A BONHOEFFERIAN CORRECTIVE
OF KARL MARX'S CRITIQUE OF RELIGION

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Konikkara Antony Paulson

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Committee Signatures:

David Willis
Chairman

Thomas L. Schubeck
Benjamin A. Reist
Kenan B. Osborne
A. Durwood Foster

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE. i

INTRODUCTION. 1

PART I

KARL MARX'S CRITIQUE OF RELIGION

Chapter

I The Continuity of Marx's Thought. 7

II Hegelian and Feuerbachian Influence on Marx. 28

III Marx's Critique of Religion. 55

IV Transcendence According to Marx. 93

V Marx's Critique of Religion as Challenge to Christianity. 107

PART II

DIETRICH BONHOEFFER'S CRITIQUE OF RELIGION

VI Bonhoeffer's Concept of "World Come of Age". 127

VII Non-religious Interpretation. 150

VIII Religionless Christianity. 175

IX Transcendence According to Bonhoeffer. 202

X Bonhoefferian Theology as Challenge to Marxism. 219

PART III

CONCLUSION

XI A Call for Dialogue. 240

BIBLIOGRAPHY. 253

PREFACE

This study is submitted as a contribution to the Marxist-Christian dialogue which has in recent years been smothered by unfavourable international politics. It is addressed primarily to the Christian community, but it is also hoped that it might invite the perspectives of other groups.

The positive, productive, and progressive nature of Marxism has attracted over one-third of the world's population. A substantial segment of this population lives in areas where Christianity has its strongholds. Why are these people drawn to Marxism? Is it because there is such great similarity between Marxism and Christianity? Or is it because Christianity has failed in its mission? What is the nature of Marx's critique of religion, and does his critique hold true even today? Is it possible to bring the resources of both Marxism and Christianity to bear upon the problems of individuals and societies? Instead of hurling condemnations and pronouncing mutual anathemas, is it possible for us to confront each other in dialogue? And when we do finally discover that our human concerns compel us to communicate, will we also find that there is a theological mandate to dialogue? In what way does Bonhoeffer's theology help us in a genuine encounter with Marxism? These are some of the basic questions we deal with in the following pages.

A dissertation dealing with Bonhoeffer's theology could not be written were it not for the contributions of Eberhard Bethge, the chief recipient of Bonhoeffer's prison letters, who is primarily responsible for bringing to the public many of Bonhoeffer's unpublished works.

I gratefully acknowledge my indebtedness for these works. I also benefited greatly from a personal correspondence with Bethge which provided additional information and stimulus.

During the writing of this dissertation many supported me with their assistance and encouragement. Special mention should be made of Louise Beck and Billie Gendron of the libraries of San Francisco Theological Seminary and the Graduate Theological Union, who made the library resources readily accessible. To all of them, I wish to express my warm thanks.

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INTRODUCTION

The hypothesis of this dissertation is that the autonomy of man which Marx proclaims and the self-transcendence of man which he asserts are both deepened and challenged by Bonhoeffer's theological understanding of Incarnation. Accordingly, the problem under investigation is that of the extent to which Bonhoeffer's theology will help in the development of an adequate theological approach to Marxism. In this light the dissertation seeks to elaborate a Bonhoefferian corrective of Marx's critique of religion.

Readers of Bonhoeffer who are familiar with Marx's writings, especially with his early writings, will notice that there are certain areas of similarity between the two. For example, Bonhoeffer's criticism of metaphysics echos Marx's denunciation of religion as "a reversed world-consciousness." The "opium of the people" is not unrelated to "cheap grace." To a certain extent, both Marx and Bonhoeffer understand religion to be a stage of human historical development. Marx believed that when class oppression ended, the "false consciousness" that arose from man's alienation, and was reflected in his religious systems, would disappear. Bonhoeffer thought that religion was nothing but a "garment of Christianity" which it wore during a particular epoch of man's history, and that we are now moving to a time of "religionless Christianity."

Nevertheless, these apparent similarities are not to be overemphasized. Though both Marx and Bonhoeffer criticized religion the differences in their respective critiques are remarkable. Marx's critique of religion stems from the notion that the idea of a creator

God hinders man's limitless future and impoverishes man's perspectives, endeavors, and struggles. Human creativity cannot reach its term in such a God, i.e., outside man. Accordingly, Marx's concept of transcendence consists essentially of endeavors and activities aimed at going beyond the given reality, the world as it is; overcoming it practically and transforming it to the benefit of humanity. Transcendence opens the way for the future. However, Marx does not regard this opening of a new future as an incursion of the divine into human history. He conceives transcendence to be a dynamic human reality, a self-transcending formation of the meaning and values of human life. Thus the objective of Marx's critique of religion is the affirmation of human creativity and autonomy.

Whereas Marx completely abandoned the concept of God by his critique of religion, Bonhoeffer tried to re-interpret the concept of God so that it would be understandable to the autonomous modern man living in a "world come of age." According to him, it was the Incarnation which made possible the coming of age. He recognized that the world's coming of age consisted of a knowledge of God which seeks to follow God where He has preceded us. This requires that we act responsibly in the situations where God has placed us. It was this recognition of the world's coming of age that led Bonhoeffer to a critique of religion. Contrary to Marx, he did not want to abolish religion, but maintained that if the church is to be relevant to our time it must be ready to criticize itself and re-examine its traditional beliefs and practices. The paradoxical expression "religionless Christianity" is not to be understood as a movement against the organized church, but as a new way of life in which the Christian will practice the "secret discipline," for "Jesus calls men, not to a new religion, but to life."

There is a notable lack of reference to Marx in Bonhoeffer's writings. However, in this study we employ Bonhoeffer as a catalyst for a meaningful encounter with Marxism. In Bonhoeffer's theology, the foundation for this encounter is found in the more basic framework of the confrontation of Christ with the world. Whereas Marx considered that God stood in the way of man's freedom and autonomy, by making Jesus the point of disclosure of God's transcendence Bonhoeffer demonstrated that it is precisely God who grants freedom and autonomy to man. He believed that a world isolated by its illusion of autonomy, which does not take seriously the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, is only a utopia of ambitious man. Bonhoeffer directs our attention to the figure of Jesus of Nazareth, who humbled himself and made himself of no account, as a norm and standard for revolution and humanization. The task of revolution and humanization is accomplished not by overthrowing the world but by its reconciliation with God. The reality of the world can be confronted and overcome by the perfect love of God, as it is revealed in Jesus Christ. The transformation of the world is thus achieved by participating in this Jesus' "being there for others." These are the outlines of a Bonhoefferian corrective of Marx. And yet, this is not just a corrective to Marx, but a clarion call to the church to awaken from its dogmatic slumber and come to a new understanding of Christian witness in our time.

Three things this dissertation is not. First, this is not an attempt to prove that Christian theology is superior to Marxist philosophy. Second, this is not an effort to place Bonhoeffer in the Marxist camp. We must regard with caution the tendency among certain philosophers and theologians to develop a Marxist interpretation of Bonhoeffer. Third, we do not try here to make a synthesis of Marxism and Christianity. Rather, Marx's and Bonhoeffer's critiques of religion are examined objectively, and the possibility of undergirding the positive criticisms of Marx with a sound theology is explored. This exploration is in the nature of an analytical study of Bonhoeffer's theology.

The basic data we use in this study are the works by Karl Marx and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Since it is impossible to divorce Friedrich Engels from any consideration of Marxist philosophy, his writings are taken into account with equal importance. Although all the works of Marx are utilized, we give a special emphasis to his early writings. This does not mean that we subscribe to the theory held by some that Marx's early writings are basically different from his later writings and that there is a discontinuity in his thought. The continuity of Marx's thought is the topic of the beginning chapter in this study. Marx's thinking was very much influenced by his predecessors, and without reference to Hegel and Feuerbach his thoughts could not be properly understood or interpreted. We do this as briefly as possible. In analysing Marx's critique of religion caution has been taken not to confuse our understanding of Marx through a premature Christian apologetic. This approach is necessary to understand Marx's criticisms in the right perspective. The chapter on "Transcendence According to Marx" deals with the deeper dimensions of Marx's critique of religion as these might be applied in the fulfillment of the Marxist programme. We then make a theological evaluation of Marx's critique of religion and find out how much the church can appropriate from this critique.

Our next step is to examine Bonhoeffer's critique of religion. All the writings of Bonhoeffer are used, with special emphasis on his prison writings. Dissatisfaction has been expressed in various corners of the theological world about the fragmentary nature of the prison writings. Here the writer agrees with John Phillips when he says,

> Perhaps what [Bonhoeffer] was communicating to us in spite of all of his immersion in the German way of doing theology was a desire to do theology off the top of his head and out of his guts rather than by deciphering scrolls.[1]

It was Bonhoeffer's realization of the world's coming of age that made necessary for him a critique of religion and that led him to a new understanding of the church. He found the guidelines for this new understanding of the church in what he calls "non-religious interpretation." But by this new kind of interpretation he did not reject the idea of the church; but the way of life in the church which he envisioned, he called "religionless Christianity." Accordingly, in the subsequent three chapters we develop these three interrelated themes--world come of age, non-religious interpretation, and religionless Christianity. The chapter on "Transcendence According to Bonhoeffer" develops Bonhoeffer's Christocentric view of human life. It is from this Christocentric view of human life that we offer our corrective of Marx's critique of religion and present a challenge to contemporary Marxists.

Both Marxism and Christianity have come a long way from the time of Marx in their attitude toward each other. In the light of this unfolding development we discuss, in the concluding chapter, the necessity and promise of Marxist-Christian dialogue, and suggest how the mutual challenge could serve the interests of both in pro-existence.

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[1] John Phillips, "The Killing of Brother Dietrich," Christianity and Crisis, Vol. XXIX, No. 2, 1969, p. 26.

PART I

KARL MARX'S CRITIQUE OF RELIGION

CHAPTER I

The Continuity of Marx's Thought

One of the most important debatable issues in the study of Marxism today is that of the question of continuity and discontinuity of Marx's thought. The question is particularly important not only because numerous conflicting answers have been given to this question, but also because these diverse theoretical answers have been connected with divergent practical aims and actions. Unless we solve this problem the study of any aspect of Marxism, particularly that of Marx's critique of religion, will not be fruitful.

The thesis that there is a discontinuity in Marx's thought has mainly appeared, and still appears, in the theory about the fundamental differences between the "young" or "immature" Marx, represented by his works up to 1844, and the "old" or "mature" Marx, represented by his later works. Those who claim to find a break between the "young" and "old" Marx maintain that alienation is a concept that was central to Marx's early thought, but he abandoned it later. Sidney Hook, for example, writes: "It is easy to show that the notion of human alienation--except for the sociological meaning it has in *Capital*--is actually foreign to Marx's conception of Man."[1] Louis Althusser maintains that Marx cannot be called a humanist, claiming that it is a term solely characteristic of Marx's early writings, but not of his whole works.[1] Another writer has stated that whereas

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[1] *From Hegel to Marx* (Michigan: University Press, 1971), p. 6. For a still more sympathetic discussion of this point, see his article, "Marx's Second Coming", *Problems of Communism*, Vol. XV, No. 4, 1966, pp. 26ff.

> in the young Marx there was a double vision of the nature of alienation, . . . Marxist thought developed along one narrow road of economic conceptions of property and exploitation, while the other road, which might have led to new, humanistic concepts of work and labour, was left unexplored.[2]

A moderate expression of this position comes from Herbert Marcuse. In a major study of Hegel and post-Hegelian movements, he gives an extensive summary of early Marxism and concludes: "Under all aspects, however, Marx's early writings are mere preliminary stages to his mature theory, stages that should not be overemphasized."[3]

Those who distinguish between the "young" and "old" Marx claim that the ideas of the young Marx contained in *The Economic & Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*[4] were abandoned by the older and mature Marx as remnants of an idealistic past connected with Hegel's teaching. In order to prove the validity of this view they point out that in *The German Ideology*[5] Marx and Engels no longer used the terms "species" (*Gattung*) and "human essence" (*menschliches Wesen*), which were used frequently in the *Manuscripts*. Furthermore, Marx said later that in *The German Ideology* he and Engels "resolved to work out in common the opposition of our view to the ideological view of German philosophy, in fact, to settle accounts with our erstwhile philosophical conscience."[1] It has been claimed that this settling of accounts with their erstwhile philosophical conscience meant that Marx and Engels had abandoned the basic ideas expressed in the *Manuscripts*.

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[1] Cf. *For Marx*, trans. by Ben Brewster (New York: Pantheon Books, 1966), pp. 51ff.

[2] Daniel Bell, "The Debate on Alienation," *Revisionism: Essays on the History of Marxist Ideas*, ed. by Leopold Labedz (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1962), p. 210.

[3] *Reason and Revolution* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960), p. 295.

[4] Ed. by Dirk J. Struik, trans. by Martin Milligan (New York: International Publishers, 1971), hereafter cited as *Manuscripts*.

[5] Written in 1845-46, ed. by R. Pascal (New York: International Publishers, 1960).

Since Marx has not worked out his thoughts on alienation systematically, in later writings, it gives the impression that it has not much to do with the self. Its manifest content is not the self but society. This statement is epitomized in Marx's statement: "Capital is . . . not a personal, it is a social power."[2] As presented in the "*Manifesto of the Communist Party*," the Marxian theory of history runs exclusively in abstract social and economic categories. The realities with which it purports to deal are social-economic realities, such as the economic base of society and the ideological superstructures, the antagonistic classes into which society is said to be split, the property system by means of which the capitalist class exploits the proletarian class, and so forth. Here everything is impersonal, strictly societal. The very idea of man has seemingly gone out of sight along with the idea of his self-alienation. Thus those who postulate the split between the "young" and "old" Marx seem to be confronted with two distinct Marxisms--the most striking difference being that of the disappearance of the "self-alienated man" in the later writings of Marx.

On the other hand, there is a significant group of philosophical scholars, existentialists, religious thinkers and Marxist dissenters who take the opposing position.[1] For them the original "humanistic" Marxism is the most valuable and significant contribution of Marx, and the depersonalized mature system appears to be a distortion of humanistic concerns. Those whose primary field of interest is religion find serious religious significance in the earlier writings of Marx. Existentialists who regard modern man's alienation as their central problem consider the early Marx as one in their fold. Within the Communist movement itself, particularly in various European sections of it, the early writings of Marx have made great influence. A number of so-called "revisionists," disillusioned by the Stalinist outcome of Russian Communism, have turned to Marx's *Manuscripts* in search of a morally meaningful Marxism.

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[1] "A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy," *Marx & Engels: Selected Works*, in one volume (New York: International Publishers, 1972), p. 183.

[2] "Manifesto of the Communist Party," *Marx & Engels: Selected Works*, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

The present writer holds the view that the "young" and the "old" Marx are essentially one and the same, and that there is a continuity of thought in Marx's writings. The basic ideas on man, as Marx expressed them in the *Manuscripts*, and the ideas of the older Marx as expressed in *Capital*, are not contradictory. Marx did not renounce his earlier views completely. Evidently Marxism of both earlier and later periods are significant for us. Therefore, our approach to the problem should be that of considering it in a purely factual way by inquiring into the relation between them. But before establishing this relation, let us examine some of the factors that contributed to the position taken by those who differentiate between the "young" and the "old" Marx.

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[1] See, for example, F. H. Heinemann, *Existentialism and the Modern Predicament* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), pp. 10-13. Jean Hyppolite maintains that Marx's mature thought is incomprehensible without an understanding of original Marxism. Cf. *Studies on Marx and Hegel*, trans. by John O'Neill (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), pp. 95ff. According to Karl Löwith, mature Marxism is a "vulgar Marxism" of material basis and superstructure. Cf. "Man's Self-alienation in the Early Writings of Marx," *Social Research*, Vol. 21, No. 2, 1954, pp. 204-5. Robert Tucker is of the opinion that attempts to read Marxism as a scientific account of social development are mistaken, and that the central inspiration of Marx is really pseudo-religious and that the evidence for this is clearest in Marx's earliest writings. Cf. *Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx* (2nd ed., Cambridge: University Press, 1972). Eugene Kamenka holds the view that Marx's central thesis is an ethical one and that the early writings are evidence for the moral indignation that leads him to adhere to the cause of the proletariat. Cf. *The Ethical Foundations of Marxism* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1962).

We found already that for a great majority of Marxists the later works of Marx remain his truly serious and significant contribution, and his earlier writings just an interesting curiosity out of his youth. Here it is to be noticed that the view, that the young and old Marx have contradictory views on man, is presented mainly by the Russian Communists.[1] Orthodox Marxists like Kautsky, Plechanov, Lenin and Bucharin did not interpret Marx in the light of his humanistic thoughts. Two reasons may be cited for this phenomenon. First, the Manuscripts were not published before 1932. They were unknown even in manuscript form. Second, The German Ideology, also, was never published in full until 1932, and for the first time in part only in 1926.[1] These facts contributed a great deal to the distorted and one-sided interpretation of Marx's ideas by the above mentioned orthodox Marxists. But the fact that these writings of Marx were more or less unknown is by no means a sufficient explanation for the neglect of Marxist humanism in the "classic" interpretation, since Capital and other published writings of Marx, such as "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction"[2] could have given a sufficient basis to visualize Marx's humanism. The more reasonable explanation, as suggested by Erich Fromm, is that "The philosophical thinking of the time from the death of Marx to the 1920's was dominated by positivistic-mechanistic ideas which influenced thinkers like Lenin and Bucharin."[3] It must also be noted that the classic Marxists were not interested in terms related to idealism and religion since they were well aware that these terms were to a large extent used by the bourgeoisie to hide basic economic and social realities. These facts indicate why Marx's humanistic thoughts were not emphasized by the "classic" interpreters of Marx.

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[1] In this connection, one cannot easily forget the fact that the Russian thinking, as well as their social and political system, is in many ways a contradiction of Marx's humanism. In their system, man is the servant of the state and of production, rather than being the supreme aim of all social arrangements. The development of the individuality of man at which Marx aimed is negated in the Russian system to an even greater extent than in contemporary capitalism. The Materialism of the Russian communists is much closer to the mechanistic materialism of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie that Marx fought against than to Marx's historical materialism. For a discussion in this line of thought, see, Per Frostin, "Modern Marxist Critique of Religion - A Survey," Lutheran World, Vol. XX, No. 2, 1973, pp. 141FF. It is also worth mentioning here that Ernst Bloch, who put much emphasis on Marx's humanism in his celebrated book Das Prinzip Hoffnung (Suhrkamp Verlag: Frankfurt am Main, 1959, 2 volumes), was severely criticized by the Communist party writers, despite the fact that his book contains a number of admiring remarks about Russian Communism.

Why, then, is there a new interest in the works of Marx as a whole? This question can be partly answered in the light of historical experience. The spiritual-humanistic tradition, in which Marx lived and which was almost drowned by the mechanistic-materialistic spirit of successful industrialism, experienced a revival after the end of the First World War. The dehumanization of man as evidenced in the cruelties of the Stalinist and Hitler regimes, in the brutality of indiscriminate killing during the war, and also the increasing dehumanization brought about by modern science and technology, led to a new expression of humanistic ideas. To sum up,

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[1] When outside circumstances made the publication of this work impossible, as Marx put it, "we abandoned the manuscript to the gnawing criticism of the mice all the more willingly as we had achieved our main purpose--self-clarification." ("A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy," Marx & Engels: Selected Works, op. cit., p. 184).

[2] Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels: On Religion (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), pp. 41-58, hereafter cited as On Religion. Unless otherwise indicated all references to On Religion are from this particular edition.

[3] Marx's Concept of Man (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1973), p. 71.

> the protest against alienation expressed by Marx, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, then muted by the apparent success of capitalist industrialism, raised its voice again after the human failure of the dominant system, and led to a re-interpretation of Marx, based on the *whole* Marx and his humanist philosophy.[1]

We shall now turn our attention to the theory of continuity of thought. Marx and Engels themselves are our only authoritative sources to shed light on this issue. If we make a thorough study of their writings, we will discover that they did not admit the existence of two Marxisms. On the contrary, many of their statements implied a belief in the essential unity of Marxism from the *Manuscripts* to the *Capital*. If Marx and Engels had supposed that there was a break between the Marxism of the *Manuscripts* and that of the *Capital*, they would never have spoken as they did about the relation of the latter to Hegelianism. Though Marx and Engels later avoided the philosophical language of their early years, and in the "Manifesto of the Communist Party" laughed at the German *literati* who "beneath the French criticism of the economic functions of money . . . wrote 'Alienation of Humanity',"[2] they always recognized that "The German working class movement is the heir of German classical philosophy."[1] His contemporaries may have been incapable of understanding Hegel, but Marx never lost his interest in him, and it is obvious that the problem of the continuity of Marx's thought is bound up with his continuing interest in Hegel. Lenin himself lent some support to this view by writing in 1914:

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 72.

[2] "Manifesto of the Communist Party", *Marx & Engels*: *Selected Works*, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

> It is impossible fully to grasp Marx's Capital, and especially the first chapter, if you have not studied and understood the whole of Hegel's Logic. Consequently, none of the Marxists for the past half century has understood Marx![2]

Engels, too, shared this view of Hegel's importance. In his essay on Feuerbach, already mentioned, he wrote:

> With Hegel philosophy comes to an end: on the one hand, because in his system he summed up its whole development in the most splendid fashion; and on the other hand, because, even though unconsciously, he showed us the way out of the labyrinth of systems to real positive knowledge of the world.[3]

In later life Marx cherished the thought of writing a short treatise on the Hegelian dialectic and his own relation to it. In a letter sent to Engels in 1858, he said:

> I am getting some nice developments. For instance, I have thrown over the whole doctrine of profit as it has existed up to now. In the method of treatment the fact that by mere accident I have again glanced through Hegel's Logic has been of great service to me. . . . If there should ever be time for such work again, I should greatly like to make accessible to the ordinary human intelligence, in two or three printer's sheets, what is rational in the method which Hegel discovered

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[1] F. Engels, "Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy," On Religion, op. cit., p. 268.
[2] Cited by Raya Dunayevskaya, "Marx's Humanism Today," Socialist Humanism (ed. by Erich Fromm) (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1965), pp. 66-67.
[3] "Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy," On Religion, op. cit., p. 222.

> but at the same time enveloped in mysticism.[1]

However, Marx couldn't fulfill this desire. The famous passage in the 1873 preface to Capital was his only further word on the matter. There he said:

> My dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite. To Hegel, the life process of the human brain, i.e., the process of thinking, which, under the name of "the Idea," he even transforms into an independent subject, is the demiurgos of the real world, and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of "the Idea". With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought. . . . The mystification which dialectic suffers in Hegel's hands, by no means prevents him from being the first to present its general form of working in a comprehensive and conscious manner. With him it is standing on its head. It must be turned right side up again, if you would discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell.[2]

In the same context Marx reminds us: "The mystifying side of Hegelian dialectic I criticized nearly thirty years ago, at a time when it was still the fashion."[3] Here the reference is to the year 1844 and to the Manuscripts. This obscure reference to his unpublished Manuscripts is entirely understandable for us when we recall that he did indeed develop in them a systematic criticism of Hegel.[4] Having turned Hegelianism "right side up again" by reading The Phenomenology of Mind[5] in materialistic-economic terms, he proceeded to criticize Hegel for representing the Produktionsgeschichte as a process of spirit's becoming in terms of knowledge. This inversion of Hegel's dialectic of history was the constitutive act of original Marxism. And now, in 1873, Marx describes it as the constitutive act of the mature Marxian dialectic. The implication is that he considered the Manuscripts as the birthplace of mature Marxism, the founding documents of scientific socialism.

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[1] Marx & Engels, Correspondence, 1846-1895 (New York: International Publishers, 1934), p. 102.

[2] Karl Marx, Capital (3 vols.; New York: International Publishers, 1972-73), Vol. I, pp. 19, 20. Engels expressed the same idea by paraphrasing Marx's statement: "...the dialectic of concepts itself became merely the conscious reflex of the dialectical motion of the real world and thus the dialectic of Hegel was placed upon its head; or rather, turned off its head, on which it was standing, and placed upon its feet." ("Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy," On Religion, op. cit., p. 249).

[3] Capital, Vol. I, op. cit., p. 19.

[4] Manuscripts, op. cit., pp. 170ff.

[5] G.W.F. Hegel, The Phenomenology of Mind, trans. by J.B. Baillie, 2nd. rev. ed. (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1949).

When Marx made the statement of the inversion of Hegelian dialectic in the 1873 preface to Capital, the Manuscripts had not been published, and their very existence remained unknown to the public. Naturally, his followers, or at least many of them, failed in making any sense out of his remarks about the genesis of scientific socialism out of German philosophy. The followers could only speculate in vain as to what he meant by the mysterious inversion of Hegel. Thus the false legend gradually arose that Marx's early philosophical period was pre-Marxist, and that Marxism itself came into being only in the aftermath of his apparent break with German philosophy in the middle of 1840's. Accordingly, his intellectual career was divided into a pre-Marxist early philosophical period and a post-philosophical later Marx period.

If there were a theme running through the whole of Marx's writings, the most obvious would be "alienation," a concept that he developed through confrontation with Hegel. Whereas for Hegel alienation is a state of consciousness subject to elimination by another state of consciousness,[1] for Marx alienation is related to real, existing objects subject to elimination only in the real sphere of object-related activity.[2]

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[1] Cf. Hegel, The Phenomenology of Mind, op. cit., pp. 509ff.
[2] Cf. Manuscripts, op. cit., pp. 178ff.

Marx's critique of Hegel, in this connection, is that the abolition of alienation on the level of mere consciousness recognizes the immanent impossibility of abolishing real alienation. Hegel's consciousness only approves a reality that it cannot change. Such a merely spiritual emancipation forces man to legitimize his chains. But Marx sees alienation as residing in a concrete relationship between man and his products, and hence his discussion on alienation is in materialistic terms. And yet, in spite of the materialistic tone, Marx's writings are related to issues of general philosophical significance, and his later writings on economy and society are meaningful only within this wider context. Marx's critique of the way in which Hegel handled the question of alienation restates Marx's general critique of philosophical idealism, and the Marxian version of materialism emerges from this discussion of alienation. Marx's views on alienation and his materialism are thus inseparable.

While The German Ideology does not use certain terms such as "human essence" (menschliches Wesen), it nevertheless continues the main trend of thought of the Manuscripts, especially the concept of alienation. Alienation, in The German Ideology, is explained as the result of the division of labour which "implies the contradiction between the interest of the separate individual or the individual family and the communal interest of all individuals who have intercourse with one another."[1] In the same paragraph the concept of alienation is defined, as in the Manuscripts,[2] in these words: "man's own deed becomes an alien power opposed to him, which enslaves him instead of being controlled by him."[3]

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[1] The German Ideology, op. cit., p. 22.
[2] Cf. Manuscripts, op. cit., pp. 106ff.
[3] The German Ideology, op. cit., p. 22.

Marx again points out that this enslavement has been one of the chief factors in historical development up to his time:

> This crystallization of social activity, this consolidation of what we ourselves produce into an objective power above us, growing out of our control, thwarting our expectations, bringing to naught our calculations, is one of the chief factors in historical development up till now.[1]

The continuity of Marx's thought has been demonstrated beyond doubt by the publication of some of Marx's notes, written in the six months from October 1857 to March 1858, under the title _Grundrisse der Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie_ (_Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy_).[2] The time and place of their publication prevented their attracting attention and it was not until 1953 that there was an accessible edition. Since it was only written for personal clarification, some parts of the _Grundrisse_ are very difficult to follow, being written in note form. But in spite of its fragmentary character, the Hegelian categories in which Marx forms his thoughts are obvious. Questions that were important in Marx's _Manuscripts_--such as the true nature of labour and the resolution of the conflict between individual and community--are taken up again in the _Grundrisse_ and explained in detail.[3] In the _Grundrisse_ Marx used the same arguments which he used in the _Manuscripts_, arguing that the need to work does not constitute in itself a restriction of freedom, provided it is not alienated work. He also speaks of the "self-realization" of the person, hence of true freedom. The *Grundrisse*, then, is as Hegelian as the *Manuscripts*, and in the light of that it is impossible to maintain that only Marx's early writings are of philosophical interest and that he lost the humanist vision in the later writings.

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[1] _Ibid_., pp. 22f.

[2] Trans. by Martin Nicolaus (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1973). It should be noted that this title is not Marx's, but stems from the first editors of these notes. It was published for the first time in Moscow in 1939. It is generally known as the _Grundrisse_, obviously, from the first word of the German title. These notes amount to almost one thousand pages which actually served Marx as a basis both for his _Critique of Political Economy_ (1859) and _Capital_ (1867).

[3] See, for example, _ibid_., pp. 163ff, 831ff.

The idea that the aim of human evolution is the unfolding of man, the creation of "wealthy" man who has overcome the contradiction between himself and nature and achieved true freedom, is expressed in many passages of *Capital*, written by the mature and old Marx. He wrote in the third volume of the *Capital*:

> Beyond it [the realm of necessity] begins that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom, which, however, can blossom forth only with this realm of necessity as its basis. The shortening of the working day is its basic prerequisite.[1]

The concept of alienation is expressed in the *Capital* in these words:

> . . .the character of independence and estrangement which the capitalist mode of production as a whole gives to the instruments of labour and to the product, as against the workman, is developed by means of machinery into a thorough antagonism.[2]

Thus the content of *Capital* is a continuation of Marx's early thoughts. The main theme of the first volume of *Capital*, surplus value, rests on the equation of work and value that goes back to the conception of man as a being who creates himself and the conditions of his life--a conception outlined in the Manuscripts.[3] It is man's nature--according to the

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[1] *Capital*, Vol. III, *op. cit.*, p. 820.
[2] *Capital*, Vol. I, *op. cit.*, p. 432.
[3] Cf. *Manuscripts*, *op. cit.*, pp. 78ff.

Manuscripts--to be constantly developing himself and the world about him in cooperation with other men. What Marx in Capital is describing is how this fundamental nature of man--to be the initiator and controller of historical process--has been transferred or alienated and how it belongs to the inhuman power of capital. The counterpart of alienated man, the unalienated or "total" man of the Manuscripts, also appears in Capital. In the chapter of "Machinery and Modern Industry" in Capital I Marx makes the same contrast between the effects of alienated and unalienated modes of production on the development of human personality. He writes:

> Modern industry, indeed, compels society, under penalty of death, to replace the detail worker of today, crippled by life long repetition of one and the same trivial operation, and thus reduced to the mere fragment of a man, by the fully developed individual, fit for a variety of labours, ready to face any change of production, and to whom the different social functions he performs, are but so many modes of giving free scope to his own natural and acquired powers.[1]

The fact that in Capital the conclusion is supported by a detailed analysis of the effect of advanced technology should not obscure the continuity. In other parts of Capital Marx speaks of the importance of producing "fully developed human beings,"[2] "the full development of human race,"[3] man's "necessity to develop himself,"[4] and of the "fragment of a man" as the result of the process of alienation.[5]

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[1] Capital, Vol. I, op. cit., p. 488.
[2] Ibid., pp. 483f.
[3] Ibid., pp. 505f.
[4] Ibid., p. 513.
[5] Ibid., p. 645.

The section of Capital that most recalls the early writings is the final section of the first chapter of volume I, entitled "The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof." The whole section is reminiscent of the section on alienated labour in the Manuscripts.[1] Marx writes:

> A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour. This is the reason why the products of labour become commodities, social things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses.[2]

Marx, then, draws a parallel between alienated labour and religion:

> In order, therefore, to find an analogy, we must have recourse to the mist-enveloped regions of the religious world. In that world the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation both with one another and the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands. This I call Fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour, so soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities.[3]

From this point of view, Capital is a detailed study of the economic aspects of the process annunciated by Marx in his Manuscripts. What was philosophically postulated in 1844 is now verified and vindicated by an analysis of capitalist economic activity undertaken with the tools of classical political economy.

Having examined the above statements from Capital, it is rather difficult to say that in his later writings Marx repudiated the idea of alienation in its human meaning, and transformed it into a "purely economic category."[1] Marx never repudiated the idea of alienation in its human sense, rather he claimed that it cannot be divorced from the concrete and real life process of the alienated individual. Marx criticized capitalism precisely because it destroyed individual personality, just as he criticized "crude communism" for the same reason. As Erich Fromm has pointed out,

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[1] Cf. Manuscripts, op. cit., pp. 106ff.
[2] Capital, Vol. I, op. cit., p. 72.
[3] Ibid.

> the statement [of Marx] that history can be explained only by class consciousness is a statement of fact, as far as previous history is concerned, not an expression of Marx's disregard of the individual.[2]

It should be remembered that Capital is only an unfinished fragment of the task that Marx set himself. In the preface to the Manuscripts he had outlined the programme of his life's work:

> I shall therefore publish the critique of law, ethics, politics, etc., in a series of distinct, independent pamphlets, and afterwards showing the interrelationship of the separate parts, together with a critique of the speculative elaboration of that material. For this reason it will be found that the interconnection between political economy and the state, law, ethics, civil life, etc., is touched upon in the present work only to the extent to which political economy itself ex professo [expressly] touches upon these subjects.[3]

But Marx never got beyond his first "pamphlet" on political economy. Had he finished the whole work he intended to do we could have received much more insights into the humanistic vision of the mature Marx.

Those who maintain that Marx discarded "man" in his later writings, and that his thoughts were dominated by class consciousness, have pointed out Marx's sixth thesis on Feuerbach in defence of their position. There Marx says:

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[1] See, for example, Daniel Bell's criticism ("The Debate on Alienation," Revisionism: Essays on the History of Marxist Ideas, op. cit., p. 197).
[2] Erich Fromm, op. cit., pp. 77f.
[3] Manuscripts, p. 63.

> Feuerbach resolves the religious essence into a *human* essence. But the human essence is no abstraction [Abstraktum] inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations.
> Feuerbach, who does not enter upon a criticism of this real essence, is consequently compelled:
> 1. To abstract from the historical process and to fix the religious sentiment [Gemüt] as something by itself and to presuppose an abstract--*isolated*--human individual.
> 2. The human essence, therefore, can with him be comprehended only as "genus," as an internal, dumb generality which merely naturally unites the many individuals.[1]

This is a typical example of how Marx has been misinterpreted by taking his statements out of context. Marx does not say that there is no human essence inherent in each single individual, but something quite different, namely, that "the *human* essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual." This is the essential point of Marx's "materialism" against Hegel's "idealism." Marx never gave up his concept of man's essence as we have shown by quoting statements from *Capital*. Instead he maintained that this essence is neither a purely biological one nor an abstraction, but one which can be understood only historically, because it unfolds in history.

This point will be understood better when we examine the *Manuscripts* where Marx decided that man's self-alienation could and should be grasped as a social relation of man to man. Only man himself can be this alien power over man, he said, but this relation of man to himself takes practical shape as a relation between the alienated worker and another man outside him, i.e., the capitalist. In this way the inner conflict of the alienated man with himself became, in Marx's mind, a social conflict between "labour" and "capital," and the alienated species-self became the class divided society. Thus, self-alienation was projected as a social phenomenon.

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[1] "Theses on Feuerbach," *On Religion*, *op. cit.*, p. 71. *Abstraktum* is the result of *Abstraktion*. *Abstraktion* is the process of ideally separating a partial aspect or quality from a total object. In Feuerbach's own words, "To abstract means to posit the *essence* of nature *outside nature*, the *essence* of man *outside man*, the *essence* of thought *outside the act of thinking*." ("Preliminary Theses on the Reform of Philosophy," *The Fiery Brook: Selected Writings of Feuerbach*, trans. by Zawar Hanfi, [New York: Doubleday & Co., 1972] p. 157, hereafter cited as *The Fiery Brook*).

One of the passages of The Holy Family, written in the so-called transitional period (1845), illustrates this point quite vividly:

> The propertied class and the class of the proletariat present the same human self-alienation. But the former class finds in this self-alienation its confirmation and its good, its own power: it has in it a semblance of human existence. The class of the proletariat feels annihilated in its self-alienation; it sees in it its own powerlessness and the reality of an inhuman existence. In the words of Hegel, the class of the proletariat is an abasement indignation at that abasement, an indignation to which it is necessarily driven by the contradiction between its human nature and its condition of life, which is the outright, decisive and comprehensive negation of that nature.[1]

Society is here envisaged as a self system whose inner dynamics are those of alienation. The antagonistic classes are collective expressions of the conflicting forces of the self system. The proletariat and the capitalist class, or labour and capital, are opposite sides of "the same human self-alienation."

Marx sees in society a self system in conflict. To put it differently, that which he sees presents itself to him from now on simply as "society." Thus in his short work "Wage Labour and Capital"

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[1] Marx & Engels, The Holy Family or Critique of Critical Critique, trans. by R. Dixon (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1956), p. 51.

(1847) he asserts:

> To say that the interests of capital and those of the workers are one and the same is only to say that capital and wage labour are two sides of one and the same relation. The one conditions the other, just as usurer and squanderer condition each other.[1]

"The same human self-alienation" has now become simply "the same relation." Marx also describes labour power as a commodity that its possessor, the worker, surrenders to capital, and declares:

> . . .the exercise of labour power, labour, is the worker's own life-activity, the manifestation of his own life. And this life-activity he sells to another person in order to secure the necessary *means of subsistence*. Thus his life-activity is for him only a means to enable him to exist. He works in order to live. He does not even reckon labour as part of his life, it is rather a sacrifice of his life.[2]

Here is the picture of the alienated labour given in the *Manuscripts*, the only difference being that Marx no longer calls it alienated labour, but simply wage labour (*Lohnarbeit*). He now apprehends the alienated self-relation as a social relation of labour and capital, and on this basis he can say that "Capital is . . . not a personal, it is a social power."[3]

This makes it clear why Marx proceeded in the "Manifesto of the Communist Party" to formulate Marxism without explicit reference to the concepts of man and his self-alienation, and why he here scornfully dismissed the whole notion of "man in general" as unreal. For him there was no longer any generic man, and hence no longer any use for the idea

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[1] *Marx & Engels*: *Selected Works*, op. cit., p. 84.
[2] *Ibid*., p. 75.
[3] "Manifesto of the Communist Party," *Marx & Engels*: *Selected Works*, *op. cit*., p. 47.

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of man's self-alienation. The alienated self-relation had transformed itself into an alienated social relation, and "man" was just the "ensemble" of such relations. Man had been split into two. There were left only the dissociated antagonistic parts, the "worker" and "capitalist," neither of them wholly human. Society itself was splitting down the centre into two hostile camps of workers and capitalists. It appeared that the realities were the warring classes themselves, and so it had always been: "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles."[1] It was absurd of the German *literati* to espouse the misty cause of mankind.[2] The only real and pressing issue was that of which side to take, labour's or capital's, in the ongoing class struggle. Thus the Marxism of the *Manifesto* evolve directly out of the Marxism of the *Manuscripts*. What he sees is still the *Selbstentäusserungsprozess* (Process of self-alienation), but he sees it as a social process. Alienation remains his central theme, but it has gone underground in his image of society.

What we have been trying to establish in this chapter is this: In spite of certain changes in mood and language, the core of the philosophy developed by the young Marx was never changed, and it is impossible to understand his concept of socialism, and his criticism of capitalism as developed in his later writings except on the basis of the concept of man which he developed in his early writings. The "young" and the "old" Marx are essentially one and the same--Marx the fighter against self-alienation, dehumanization and exploitation, Marx the combatant for the full humanization of man, for the many sided development of man's human possibilities, for the abolition of class society and for the realization of an association in which "the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all."[1]

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 35.

[2] Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 56f.

This does not mean, however, that Marx's views never changed, but rather that there are not two fundamentally different and mutually unconnected Marxs. Marx's thought was constantly changing (in the sense that it was developing), but there were not such turns in this process as would represent a complete break with former ideas and the passage to entirely different or even opposite conceptions. The "young" Marx is not an abstract philosopher, nor is the "old" Marx a stern scientist. Marx's thought from beginning to end is a revolutionary humanism, and only when it is considered as a whole can it serve as an adequate theoretical basis of the revolutionary struggle for a democratic, humanistic socialism. It is in the light of this fundamental coherence of his thought that we should examine Marx's critique of religion.

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[1] "Manifesto of the Community Party," Marx & Engels: Selected Works, op. cit., p. 29.

CHAPTER II

Hegelian and Feuerbachian Influence on Marx

In the preceding chapter we found that in spite of his critical approach to Hegelian philosophy Marx never lost interest in Hegel, and that the problem of the continuity of Marx's thought was bound up with his continuing interest in Hegel. Marx's criticism of religion can only be understood against this background of Hegelian philosophy, and also of the anthropology of Feuerbach, which it extends and supersedes. Therefore, in this chapter we shall discuss to what extent Marx's critique of religion was influenced by Hegel and Feuerbach.

The great merit of Hegel's philosophy, wrote Engels, was that

> for the first time the whole world, natural, historical, intellectual, is represented as a process, i.e., as in constant motion, change, transformation, development; and the attempt is made to trace out the internal connection that makes a continuous whole of all this movement and development.[1]

It is impossible to give an adequate account of the ideas of so complex a thinker in so short a space. What is aimed at here is a very brief discussion of those aspects of Hegel's thought which Marx took seriously for his own critique of religion. It is also to be kept in mind that the Hegel whom we are considering is Hegel as seen through the eyes of Marx and Engels, and hence we must place this qualification upon our reference to Hegel.[1]

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[1] Engels, "Socialism: Utopian and Scientific," _Marx & Engels: Selected Works_, _op. cit._, p. 413.

Hegel started from the belief that, as he said of the French Revolution, "man's existence centres in his head, i.e., in Thought, inspired by which he builds up the world of reality."[2] In his greatest work, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, Hegel traces the development of mind or spirit (*Geist*), reintroducing historical movement into philosophy and asserting that the human mind can attain to absolute knowledge. He analyzes the development of human consciousness, from its immediate perception of the here and now, to the stage of self-consciousness, the understanding that allows man to analyze the world and order his own actions accordingly.[3] Following this is the stage of reason itself, understanding of the real, after which spirit, by means of religion and art, attains the absolute knowledge, the level at which man recognizes in the world the stages of his own reason. Hegel calls these stages "alienations," in so far as they are creations of the human mind yet thought of as independent and superior to the human mind. This absolute knowledge is at the same time a sort of recapitulation of the human spirit, for each successive stage retains elements of the previous ones as it goes beyond them. This movement that suppresses and yet conserves Hegel called Aufhebung, a word that has this double meaning in German. Hegel also talked of "the power of the negative," thinking that there was always a tension between any present state of affairs and what it was becoming. For any present state of affairs was in the process of being negated, changed into something else. This process was what Hegel meant by dialectic.

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[1] Some basic knowledge of at least four works by Hegel is essential for a study like this: *The Phenomenology of Mind*, *op. cit.*; *Philosophy of Right*, trans. by T. M. Knox (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967); *Philosophy of History*, trans. by J. Sibree (New York: P. F. Collier and Son, MCMI); and *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, 3 vols., trans. by E. B. Speirs and J. Burdon Sanderson, ed. by E. B. Speirs (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, & Co. Ltd., 1895). For a thorough discussion of Hegel's philosophy in general, see, J. N. Findlay, *Hegel: A Re-examination* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1958); Walter Kaufmann, *Hegel: Reinterpretation, Texts, and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1965); and Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of the Social Theory* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960). For the religious significance of Hegel's philosophy, see, Emil L. Fackenheim, *The Religious Dimension in Hegel's Thought* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967) and Darrel E. Christensen, ed., *Hegel and the Philosophy of Religion* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970). From a theological point of view, the chapter on Hegel in Karl Barth, *From Rousseau to Ritschl* (London: SCM Press, 1959) is excellent. Two good books to study specifically the influence of Hegel on Marx are: Louis Dupré, *The Philosophical Foundations of Marxism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1966) and Jean Hyppolite, *Studies on Marx and Hegel*, trans. by John O'Neill (New York: Harper & Row, 1969).

[2] *Philosophy of History*, *op. cit.*, p. 558.

[3] Cf. *The Phenomenology of Mind*, pp. 147ff; pp. 215ff.

Hegel's views on religion played a vital role in the formation of his thought.[1] Religion, together with philosophy, was for him the highest form of man's spiritual life. Religion[2] was the return of the Absolute Idea to itself. The content of the religion was the same as that of philosophy, though its method of apprehending was different. For whereas philosophy employed concepts, religion used imagination. These unsatisfactory imaginings afforded only a fragmentary and imprecise knowledge of what philosophy conprehended rationally. But religion could be linked to philosophy by means of a philosophy of religion, and Hegel considered that the particular dogmatic contents of the religious imagination were necessary stages in the development of Absolute Spirit. The philosophy of religion interpreted at a higher level both naive faith and critical reason. Thus Hegel rejected the view of the eighteenth century rationalists that religion did inadequately what only science was competent to do. According to him, religion (or his philosophical interpretation of it) fulfilled man's constant psychological need to have an image of himself and of the world by which he could orientate himself.

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[1] See especially, Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, Vol. I, op. cit., pp. 6-48.

[2] By religion Hegel meant Protestant Christianity, which he considered the highest and final form of religion. He remained a Lutheran all his life.

Also for Hegel, the acceptance of a certain form of religion conditions the development of a corresponding form of political community: a people's idea of God determines what they are, and accordingly the form of their state. Hegel said:

> A people's idea of God determines its relationship with God and its idea of itself; so a religion is also a *people's concept of itself*. A people having nature for its God cannot be a free people; not until it thinks of God as a spirit above nature is it itself a spirit and free.[1]

According to Hegel, therefore, religion forms the "basis" upon which a superstructure is raised. Only with Christianity did a free state become possible, because only then was the "unlimited right of the personality" recognized, but this potential was only fully realized in Protestantism.

Hegelian philosophy leaves a number of open questions as far as the importance, nature and position of religion in real life is concerned. One of the questions is: Has religion an independent existence--apart from man and society--or is it merely the objectified form in which the union of subjective and objective spirit is seen by men at a given stage, in which they imagine, feel, or understand this union? Another question that comes out of the Hegelian treatment of the subject is: Has the religious idea any value of its own apart from "absolute knowledge," speculative wisdom, or is it only to be accepted as a temporarily unavoidable consequence of the defective philosophical education of the majority of social classes? The suggestion of an elite in Hegel's speculative philosophy is attacked by many, especially Bruno Bauer and his friends. Hegel said: "The _content_ of religion and philosophy is the same, but _religion_ is the truth _for all mankind_."[1] This distinction between an exoteric form of truth accessible to all, and an esoteric form reserved for philosophers was again contested by the radical theologians of the time.

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[1] Cited by Iring Fetscher, "Developments in the Marxist Critique of Religion," *Concilium*, Vol. 16, ed. by Johannes Metz (New York: Paulist Press, 1966), p. 133.

After Hegel's death differences of opinion began to occur within the Hegelian school that were to lead eventually to a split between "Right Hegelians" and "Left Hegelians." These terms were used to designate religious attitudes. The right of the school held to the slogan "the real is the rational" and saw nothing irrational in the traditional representation of religion. They considered that the major representations of religion--the transcendental personality of God, the uniqueness of Christ, the individual immortality of the soul, etc.--were part of its essential content. Thus they upheld the Hegelian doctrine of the unity of philosophy and religion. The Left Hegelians could not admit this unity; they began to ask whether Hegel was not really a pantheist. Questions began to be asked about the personality of God and the immortality of the soul. Hegel's teaching on these points was not clear, and the verbal tradition of his lectures often varied. The principle that the Left Hegelians held to was that "the rational is the real." Thus the Left side of the school opposed the Right's optimism with a pessimism that set out to destroy the dogmas enshrined in religious representations that were now outdated. In Germany religion and politics were very much connected in those days. Naturally, the Left Hegelians paved the way for a movement of religious criticism which would swiftly become secularized into one of political opposition. It was as a member of this rapidly changing movement that Marx first began to work out his views on philosophy and society.

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[1] _Ibid_., p. 135.

Marx went through the same evolution as classical German philosophy itself--from Kant and Fichte through Schelling to Hegel. On November 10, 1837 Marx sent a letter to his father in which he described in detail the evolution of his thought during the study period at the university of Berlin.[1] According to Marx, the systems of Kant and Fichte were the inspiration for his own ideas at that time. It was a period of intense intellectual activity in several areas. Several sleepless nights of work caused him a severe illness. His doctor advised a change of scene and Marx went to the village of Stralow just outside Berlin. Here his views underwent a big change. He wrote:

> A curtain had fallen, my holy of holies had been shattered, and new gods had to be found. Setting out from idealism--which, let me say in passing, I had compared to and nourished with that of Kant and Fichte--I hit upon seeking the Idea in the real itself. If formerly the gods had dwelt above the world, they had now become its center.[2]

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[1] Cf. Writings of Young Marx on Philosophy and Society, trans. & ed. by Loyd D. Easton and Kurt H. Guddat (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1967), hereafter cited as Easton & Guddat, pp. 40-50.

[2] Ibid., p. 46.

Marx had rejected Hegel's conceptual rationalism previously. But now it began to seem to him as though the Idea was immanent in the real.

In order to clarify his mind Marx began to write. He produced a twenty-four page dialogue entitled "Cleanthes, or the Starting Point and the Necessary Progress of Philosophy." For this purpose he acquainted himself with natural science, history and a study of the work of Schelling. The influence of the latter is plain in Marx's description of the dialogue as reuniting art and science and comprising "a philosophic-dialectical discussion of the godhead manifested as a concept per se, as religion, as nature, and as history."[1] This dialogue ended with Marx's conversion to Hegelianism. He wrote:

> My last sentence was the beginning of the Hegelian system, and this task . . .this darling child of mine, nurtured in moonlight, bears me like a false hearted siren into the clutches of the enemy.[2]

This process of giving up his romantic idealism and delivering himself over to "the enemy" was an extremely painful experience for Marx. He describes its immediate results as follows:

> Because of my vexation, I was for several days quite unable to think. Like a lunatic I ran around in the garden beside the Spree's dirty water "which washes the soul and dilutes tea." I even went out hunting with my host and then returned hotfoot to Berlin, wishing to embrace every loafer at the street corners. . . .because of the futility of my lost labors, from consuming vexation at having to make an idol of a view I detest, I fell sick.[3]

His conversion to Hegelianism was completed firstly by a thorough reading of Hegel. While he was sick he "got to know Hegel from beginning to end, and most of his disciples as well."[1] Then he joined a sort of Hegelian discussion group: "Through several meetings with friends in Stralow I became a member of a Doctor's Club."[2] It was here Marx got acquainted with Bruno Bauer, the leading light in the club, who had been lecturing in theology at the university since 1834.

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[1] Ibid., p. 47.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid., pp. 47, 48.

This conversion to Hegelianism, however, didn't last for long. Marx's doctoral dissertation begun towards the end of 1838 and submitted in April 1841, reveals his growing disagreement with Hegel. The dissertation, entitled "The Difference Between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature," consisted of a criticism of those who had equated the natural philosophies of Democritus and Epicurus and a catalogue of the differences between these philosophies. There was an appendix on Plutarch's criticism of Epicurus and two lengthy notes on Hegel and Schelling. Marx's choice of the subject for the dissertation was destined to throw light on the contemporary post-Hegelian situation in philosophy by the examination of a parallel period in the history of Greek philosophy. Marx sees philosophy after Hegel as being like that after Aristotle--practical minded, turning against the apparent world. Unfortunately, parts of the dissertation are missing. This loss is compensated partly by the preservation of Marx's preliminary notes for the dissertation.[3] Their size far exceeds that of the dissertation, and their significance for the development of Marx's thinking during those years is, in fact, greater in some respects than that of the dissertation itself. The comparison between Democritean and Epicurean philosophy, which is the theme of the actual dissertation, is likely to have been a minor aspect of Marx's preparatory reflections. Since the preparatory studies provide such a wealth of insights in addition to the text of the dissertation, we have to treat these two kinds of writings as being successive stages of an indivisible process of thinking on this philosophical subject.

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[1] *Ibid.*

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] For the dissertation and the preliminary notes, see, *Karl Marx/ Friedrich Engels*: *Historisch-Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. by D. Rjazanov (Glashütten: Auvermann, 1970), Erste Abteilung, Band I, Erster Halbband, pp. 9ff, hereafter cited as *MEGA* followed by division, volume, part if applicable, and page. The dissertation is translated into English by Norman D. Livergood, *Activity in Marx's Philosophy* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967), pp. 57-109. Parts of the notes to the dissertation are found in *Easton & Guddat*, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-66. For a lucid exposition of Marx's dissertation, see the following works: Henry F. Mins, "Marx's Doctoral Dissertation,"

In discussing the difference between the natural philosophies of Democritus and Epicurus, Marx favoured the latter. He found Epicurus' concept of the atom superior to Democritus' more empirical view because it implied independence, freedom, and an "energizing principle" for experience. Marx begins his account of the relationship of the two philosophers with a paradox: Epicurus held all appearances to be objectively real but at the same time, since he wished to conserve freedom of the will, denied that the world was governed by immutable laws and thus in fact seemed to decry the objective reality of nature. Democritus, on the other hand, was very sceptical about the reality of appearance, but yet held the world to be governed by necessity. From this Marx concludes that Epicurus' physics was really only a part of his moral philosophy. He did not merely copy Democritus' physics, as was commonly thought, but introduced the idea of spontaneity into the

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Science & Society, Vol. XII, No. 1, 1948, pp. 157-69; Benjamin Farrington, The Faith of Epicurus (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1967); Arend Th. Van Leeuwen, Critique of Heaven (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972); and David McLellan, Marx Before Marxism (New York: Harper & Row, 1970).

movement of the atoms, and to Democritus' world of inanimate nature ruled by mechanical laws he added a world of animate nature in which the human will operated.[1] Marx thus favours the views of Epicurus for two reasons: firstly, his emphasis on absolute autonomy of the human spirit has freed men from all superstitions of transcendent objects; secondly, the emphasis on "free individual self-consciousness" shows one way of going beyond the system of a "total philosophy."

In the preface to his dissertation Marx briefly outlines previous mistaken interpretations of Epicurean philosophy and mentions the insufficiency of Hegel's treatment of the period. He then justifies his own inclusion of Plutarch's attack on Epicurus' atheism, and praises the supremacy of philosophy over all other disciplines, and in particular over theology. Marx substantiates his point by citing a passage from David Hume:

> It is certainly a kind of insult to philosophy, whose sovereign authority ought to be acknowledged on all sides, if one forces it to defend itself on every occasion because of its conclusions and to justify itself against every art and science that takes offense at it. One thinks of a king accused of high treason against his own subjects.[2]

Thus Marx makes his own the Young Hegelian criticism of the master's reconciliation of philosophy and religion. He continues:

> Philosophy, as long as a drop of blood shall beat in his heart, being absolutely free and master of the universe, will never grow tired of throwing to its adversaries the cry of Epicurus: "The blasphemous is not he who scorns the gods of the masses, but those who adhere to the idea that the

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[1] Cf. David McLellan, Marx Before Marxism, op. cit., pp. 52ff.

[2] Norman D. Livergood, Activity in Marx's Philosophy, op. cit., p. 62. Also see, David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature, ed. by L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), p. 250.

masses create the gods.[1]

Marx thought that it was characteristic of the post-Aristotelian philosophies that in them "all the elements of self-consciousness are represented."[2] This self-consciousness was the central concept of the philosophy that the Young Hegelians were elaborating.[3] Hegel, too, had referred to the post-Aristotelian period as that of self-consciousness,[4] but his radical disciples took it out of its carefully circumscribed context and made it into an absolute principle. For them, man's self-consciousness develops continually and realizes that forces it had thought separate from itself--religion for example--are really its own creation. Thus the task of self-consciousness and its principle weapon, philosophical criticism, is to expose all forces and ideas that stand opposed to the free development of this human self-consciousness. This enthusiasm for the philosophy of self-consciousness is reflected in the body of the dissertation where Marx unfavourably contrasts the mechanistic determinism of Democritus with the Epicurean ethic of liberty. It was above all this liberating aspect of Epicurus that Marx admired.

In an extended note that he added to his dissertation at the end of 1841, Marx claims that Hegel inverted the traditional proofs for the existence of God and thereby refuted them. Whereas traditional theology said: "Since contingency truly exists, God exists," Hegel turned this into: "Since contingency does not exist, God or the absolute does."[1] Marx, then, poses a dilemma. The first possibility is that the proofs for the existence of God are "empty tautologies," like the ontological argument which Marx stated in the form: "What I conceive for myself as actual (realiter), is an actual conception for me."[2] In that case any gods would have an equal reality. Here Marx makes reference to Kant. Kant's famous refutation of the ontological proof by comparing one hundred conceived dollars with one hundred real ones was not to the point. In fact, Marx says, paper money is very similar to belief in gods. If you import paper money into a country where it is not recognized then its value would be purely imaginative.

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[1] Livergood, op. cit., p. 62.

[2] Ibid., p. 64.

[3] The term "philosophy of self-consciousness," which the Young Hegelians had adopted, was derived from the title which had formerly been given to the cycle of Epicurean, Stoic and Sceptical schools. It was the great merit of these philosophical systems to have rescued the inner happiness of individual man from the ruins of Greek civilization.

[4] Cf. The Phenomenology of Mind, op. cit., pp. 241ff.

> If some had taken a Wendish god to the ancient Greeks, he would have found proof for the non-existence of this god, because this god did not exist for the Greeks. What a certain country is for foreign gods, the country of reason is for God altogether--namely, a place where God no longer exists.[3]

The second possibility is that

> the proofs for the existence of God are nothing but proofs for the existence of the essentially human self-consciousness and logical explication of it. Take the ontological argument. What existence is immediate in being thought? Self-consciousness.[4]

Marx claims that in this sense all proofs for the existence of God are proofs for his non-existence. For a valid proof would have to run: "Since nature is imperfect, God exists." "Since a non-rational world exists, God exists." "Since there is no rationale in things, God exists."[1] But this would amount to saying that non-rationality constituted God's existence. Marx finished his note with its strange mixture of post-Hegelian philosophy and the simple rationalism of the Enlightenment by quoting two passages from Schelling:

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[1] Easton & Guddat, op. cit., p. 65.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid., pp. 65f.

> When you presuppose the idea of an objective god, how can you speak of laws which reason produces from itself, since autonomy can be attributed only to an absolutely free being.
> It is a crime against humanity, to conceal principles which are generally communicable.[2]

In the previous chapter we found Marx's observation that in Hegel the dialectic stood on its head.[3] For Hegel, the self-development of thought is the real movement and facts are only reflections of this superior reality. As for Marx, the dialectical movement is merely a reflection of the actual development of the real world. So Marx set out to put the dialectic back on its feet. Dialectical laws, he maintains, are abstracted from facts. For him, the dialectic is a matter of social relation. The moments of opposition are objective conditions independent of thought. The opposing elements are classes; moments of opposition become revolutionary phases of development.

Marx criticizes that Hegel's whole system is one of concepts; the universal idea is taken as the subject, real concrete entities as predicates. Actuality as a predicate is dealt with as a mere determination of the idea. Marx contended that Hegel had seen the problems of the world as problems of idea, thus Hegel's solution was posited in the realm of the pure intellect. Problems are solved by means of theoretical pronouncements and systems of thought. Marx struggled fiercely against this by means of his own criticism:

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[1] Ibid., p. 66.
[2] Ibid. The passages are from Schelling's "Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism."
[3] Vide supra, p. 15.

> Speculative philosophy, to be exact, Hegel's philosophy, must transpose all questions from the form of human common sense to the form of speculative reason and change the real question into a speculative one to be able to answer it. Having distorted my question on my lips and put its own question on my lips like the catechism, it could naturally have a ready answer to all my questions, also like the catechism.[1]

According to Marx, the basic defect in Hegel is that though Hegel does grasp labor as the self-conforming essence of man, yet "the only labor which Hegel knows and recognizes is abstractly mental labor."[2] Hegel thought that reality was spirit realizing itself. In this process spirit produced a world that it thought at first was external; only later did it realize that this world was its own production. Spirit was not something separate from this productive activity; it only existed in and through this activity. At the beginning of this process spirit was not aware that it was externalizing or alienating itself. Only gradually did spirit realize that the world was not external to it. It is the failure to realize this that constituted, for Hegel, alienation. This alienation would cease when men become fully self-conscious and understand their environment and their culture to be emanations of spirit. Freedom consisted in this understanding, and freedom was the aim of history. What Marx did was to reject the notion of spirit and retain only finite individual beings. Thus the Hegelian relationship of spirit and the world become the Marxian notion of the relationship of man to his social being. Marx says that Hegel only takes account of man's mental activities, i.e., of his ideas, and that these, though important, are by themselves insufficient to explain social and cultural change.

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[1] Marx & Engels, The Holy Family, op. cit., p. 121.

[2] Manuscripts, op. cit., p. 177.

As Sydney Hook has pointed out,

> If for Hegel history is a progressive realisation of *freedom*, for Marx it is a progressive development toward the *socialisation* of the means of life. Without such socialisation, freedom is a fetish--an empty, formal right which cannot be exercised.[1]

To sum up how Marx differed from Hegel: Hegel wanted to provide an idealist (spiritual) philosophy of all reality. This philosophy was intended to comprehend reality as it was, i.e., as it had become. So Hegel took the world into his political philosophy and made of it an object of thought. Hegel's thought then became a confirmation of the world, because in it the world was justified as and for what it was. Against this materialism of descent Marx posited human self-consciousness as the determinant of the form of government. Marx wanted to comprehend reality as it already, and of itself, pointed to the future; he looked in the present reality for the seeds of the reality to come. History could not stay put in the present state of affairs, but had always to move on in the direction of a future rationality. Rationality lay in the future as that which ought to be pursued, and was in striking contrast to present reality. Thus the path which history must follow is a dialectical one.

Whereas Hegel's dialectic was one of concepts, Marx's dialectic was one of social forces. While Hegel remained in a world of abstract ideas, Marx turned back to concrete reality. It is to be noted here that though Marx reacted against Hegel's idealism, his reaction wasn't one of materialism. It is true that Marx used the term "materialism" for his own thought, but even in his later writings Marx didn't use it in the formal sense of the word. Marx's materialism is concerned not with matter in the physical and chemical sense, but with man who influences nature through the work process and produces himself out of nature. He wanted to eliminate the opposition between a supernatural and a natural reality. The supernatural reality could be one of God, or of ideas, or of religion, or of metaphysics--and it is this ideal reality which was rejected by Marx. The spirit which does exist is the human spirit, bodily spirit; and according to Marx, there is no other. From the beginning to the end of his thinking and writing Marx made use of Hegel's dialectical method, and he continued to urge his followers to study Hegel. However, we should keep it in mind that he accepted only Hegel's method but rejected the content of Hegel's philosophy. He regarded Hegel as standing outside reality. Marx looked for the reality in man--man as he actually is, set in this world, equipped with all his needs and desires. Man had to change the circumstances of his life; he had himself to make the world a human world. Marx rejected the philosophy which was only contemplation, but retained the philosophy which actually intervened in the world.

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[1] Sydney Hook, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

It is against this background that Marx's enthusiastic reception of Feuerbach's philosophy is to be understood. Marx's profound interest in Feuerbach can be found in a short note that he wrote in 1842 entitled, "Luther as Arbiter between Strauss and Feuerbach." In this note he cited at length a passage from Luther to support Feuerbach's humanist interpretation of miracles as against the transcendent view of Strauss. He finished the note by giving this advice to speculative theologians and philosophers:

> Free yourselves from the concepts and prepossessions of existing speculative philosophy if you want to get at things differently, as they are, that is to say, if

> you want to arrive at the *truth*. And there is no other road for you to *truth* and *freedom* except that leading *through* the stream of fire (the *Feuer-bach*). Feuerbach is the *purgatory* of the present times.[1]

Marx depended very much on Feuerbach for his own criticism of Hegelian philosophy. Every page of the critique of Hegel's political philosophy that Marx elaborated during the summer of 1843 shows the influence of Feuerbach's method. In his "Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic and Philosophy as a Whole,"[2] Marx discusses the various attitudes of the Young Hegelians to Hegel, and singles out Feuerbach as the only constructive thinker. Feuerbach was the only one of Hegel's disciples who had been able to come to terms with Hegel's dialectic. Marx said:

> *Feuerbach* is the only one who has a *serious, critical* attitude to the Hegelian dialectic and who has made genuine discoveries in this field. He is in fact the true conqueror of the old philosophy. The extent of his achievement, and the unpretentious simplicity with which he, Feuerbach, gives it to the world, stand in striking contrast to the opposite attitude of the others.[3]

Engels also shared this view. Reminiscing in later years about Feuerbach's *magnum opus*, *The Essence of Christianity*, Engels remarked:

> Then came Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity*. With one blow it pulverized the contradiction in that without circumlocutions it placed materialism on the throne again. . . .One must oneself have experienced the liberating effect of this book to get an idea of it. Enthusiasm was general; we all became Feuerbachians. How enthusiastically Marx greeted the new conception and how much--in spite of all critical reservations--he was influenced by it, one may read in *The Holy Family*.[4]

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[1] *Easton & Guddat*, op. cit., p. 95.

[2] Cf. *Manuscripts*, *op. cit.*, pp. 170ff.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 172.

[4] "Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy," *On Religion*, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

What was this great message of Feuerbach which had such a significant influence on Marx and Engels?[1] Feuerbach abolishes the "theological essence" of religion in favour of its anthropological essence, reducing it precisely to that non-spiritual form which Hegel attacked as being mere "feeling." As Karl Löwith argues,

> Feuerbach's 'essence' of Christianity is not a critical destruction of Christian theology and Christianity, but an attempt to preserve the essential part of Christianity, specifically in the form of a religious 'anthropology'."[2]

For Feuerbach, the transcendence of religion is grounded upon the immanent transcendence of feeling. He said:

> Feeling is thy own power, but at the same time a power distinct from thee, and independent of thee; it is in thee, above thee; it is itself that which constitutes the objective in thee--thy own being which impresses thee as another being; in short, thy God. How wilt thou, then, distinguish from this objective being within thee another objective being? How wilt thou get beyond thy feeling?[3]

The axiom of Feuerbach's criticism of religion is that anthropology is the mystery of Christian theology: "Man is the God of Christianity, Anthropology the mystery of Christian Theology."[4] The task of anthropology is to awaken man to the truth of religion and to eliminate its falsity: to show that the consciousness of God is the consciousness of the species, and that what man adores is himself. The true view of man is the reverse of the religious view, since

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[1] To understand Feuerbach's message one should read at least two of his major works: The Essence of Christianity, trans. by George Eliot (New York: Harper & Row, 1957) and Lectures on the Essence of Religion, trans. by Ralph Manheim (New York: Harper & Row, 1967). In addition to that, in our present study one should be familiar with his shorter writings, The Fiery Brook, op. cit. For a discussion of Feuerbach's philosophy in general, see, William B. Chamberlain, Heaven Wasn't His Destination: The Philosophy of Ludwig Feuerbach (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1941); and Eugene Kamenka, The Philosophy of Ludwig Feuerbach (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970).

[2] From Hegel to Nietzsche, trans. by David E. Green (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1967), p. 331.

[3] The Essence of Christianity, p. 11.

[4] Ibid., p. 336.

> that which in religion holds the first place--namely, God--is, . . .in itself and according to truth, the second, for it is only the nature of man regarded objectively; and that which to religion is second--namely, man--must therefore be constituted and declared the first.[1]

This means that the essence of religion is the essence of man. Religion is an "objectification" of man's primitive essential needs, it has no particular content of its own. Properly understood, the knowledge of God is man's knowledge of himself, but knowledge which is as yet unaware of its own nature. "Religion is man's earliest and also indirect form of self-knowledge,"[2] a detour taken by man on the way to finding himself. Man first transfers his own essence to a point external to himself, before he finds it within himself. He said:

> Religion, at least the Christian, is the relation of man to himself, or more correctly to his own nature (i.e., his subjective nature); but a relation to it, viewed as a nature apart from his own. The divine being is nothing else than the human being, or, rather, the human nature purified, freed from the limits of the individual man, made objective--i.e., contemplated and revered as another, a distinct being. All the attributes of the divine nature are, therefore, attributes of the human nature.[3]

According to Feuerbach, both religion and Hegelian philosophy have deprived man of his natural absoluteness. Actually, Hegelianism is only religion brought to reason. Claiming that God is different from man and, accordingly, that man's divinity is something to be achieved, both religion and Hegelian philosophy have alienated man from his very essence. They ascribe man's own highest perfection to a being different from man, to someone who does not even so much as exist. Therefore the more they exalt the "absolute," the more they degrade man. That is why Feuerbach said: "The more empty life is, the fuller, the more concrete is God. The impoverishing of the real world and the enriching of God is one act. Only the poor man has a rich God."[1]

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 270f.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 13.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 14.

The intention of Feuerbach's critical philosophy is to break down both theology and speculative philosophy into anthropology. Not only religious consciousness, but also its sublimated philosophical form, Hegelian speculation, must be exposed as false consciousness. In contrast, actual material man is taken as the positive starting point, and the "I-Thou" relationship and love as the fundamental social aspect. Positivism is chosen as the methodical principle. He said: "Philosophy is the knowledge of _what_ is. To think and know things and being _as_ they are--that is the highest law, the highest task of philosophy."[2] God, the object of theology, and the "absolute spirit," the object of speculation, are seen by Feuerbach as objectifications and projections of human characteristics into an "other world" of individual human reality. He says:

> The object of any subject is nothing else than the subject's own nature taken objectively. Such as are a man's thoughts and dispositions, such is his God; so much worth as a man has, so much and no more has his God. Consciousness of God is self-consciousness, knowledge of God is self-knowledge. By his God thou knowest the man, and by the man his God; the two are identical. Whatever is God to a man, that is his heart and soul; and conversely, God is the manifested inward nature, the expressed self of a man,--religion the solemn unveiling of a man's hidden treasures, the revelation of

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[1] _Ibid._, p. 73.

[2] Feuerbach, "Preliminary Theses on the Reform of Philosophy," _The Fiery Brook_, p. 161.

> his intimate thoughts, the open confession of his love-secrets.[1]

This is the precise opposite of the formula in which Hegel's speculative philosophy had expressed the relationship between God's self-knowledge and man's consciousness of God.

In the _Essence of Christianity_ there is another indication of a theory of the origins of religion. There he says:

> God is the optative of the human heart transformed into the _tempus finitum_, the certain, blissful "IS"--the unrestricted omnipotence of feeling, prayer hearing itself, feeling perceiving itself, the echo of our cry of anguish. Pain must give itself utterance; involuntarily the artist seizes the lute that he may breathe out his sufferings in its tones. He soothes his sorrow by making it audible to himself, by making it objective; he lightens the burden which weighs upon his heart by communicating it to the air, by making his sorrow a general existence. But nature listens not to the plaints of man, it is callous to his sorrows. Hence man turns away from Nature, from all visible objects. He turns within, that here, sheltered and hidden from the inexorable powers, he may find audience for his griefs. Here he utters his oppresive secrets; here he gives vent to his stifled sighs. This open-air of the heart, this outspoken secret, this uttered sorrow of the soul, is God. God is a tear of love, shed in the deepest concealment over human misery. 'God is an unutterable sigh, lying in the depths of the heart.'[2]

Later we will find that some of the comments Marx makes in "Contribution to the critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction"[3] are reminiscent of this statement of Feuerbach.

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[1] _Essence of Christianity_, _op. cit._, pp. 12f.

[2] _Ibid._, pp. 121f. In the last sentence of the paragraph he is quoting from Sebastian Frank von Wörd, _Zinkgrefs Apophthegmata deutscher Nation_.

[3] Cf. _On Religion_, _op. cit._, pp. 41ff.

In short we have two sources from which religious concepts spring according to Feuerbach. First, there is the intellectual side, which consists of the inability of the individual to attribute to himself the human qualities of his endlessly self-perfecting species. He imagines these qualities as extended indefinitely which causes him to hypostatize from these predicates a subject in an "other world". Then there is the emotional side, which consists of the inability to comfort oneself in any other way in the pain and sorrow which are an integral part of human existence.

In the "Preliminary Theses on the Reform of Philosophy,"[1] Feuerbach wished to apply to speculative philosophy the approach he had already used with regard to religion: theology had still not been completely destroyed; it had a last rational bulwark in Hegel's philosophy, which was as great a mystification as any theology. Hegel's dialectic started and ended with the infinite. In that case, the finite, i.e., man, is only a phase in the evolution of a superhuman spirit:

> The essence of theology is the transcendent; i.e., the essence of man posited outside man. The essence of Hegel's Logic is transcendent thought; i.e., the thought of man posited outside man.[2]

Feuerbach maintains that philosophy should not start from God or the absolute, nor even from being as the predicate of absolute; philosophy had to begin with the finite, the particular, the real, and acknowledge the primacy of the senses. Hegel's philosophy was the last refuge of theology and as such had to be abolished.[3] This would come about from a realization: "The true relationship of thought to being is this only: Being is the subject, thought the predicate. Thought comes from being, but being does not come from thought."[1]

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[1] Cf. The Fiery Brook, pp. 153ff.
[2] Ibid., p. 156.
[3] Cf. Ibid., p. 168.

The critical distinction between religion and philosophy, according to Feuerbach, is based exclusively on the character of "images". That is to say, religion itself takes the objective images constructed by man as though they were not images, but rather self-sufficient "things." Hegelian philosophy, on the other hand, takes them as mere constructs of the imagination, images which as such are without truth. But Feuerbach does not, like Hegel, wish to translate the images into "thoughts"; neither does he wish to leave them untranslated, image-like objects. He seeks instead to view these images as images of the manifestation of the essence of man. Theology is transformed thereby into "psychic pathology." All religious ideas are translated back into their foothold in the senses, from which they originally proceeded: the symbolic bread into palpable bread, the symbolic wine into real wine. He adds: "I . . . put in the place of the barren baptismal water, the beneficent effect of real water."[2] While Hegel was still concerned with demonstrating the inner agreement between philosophy and the dogmas of Christianity, Feuerbach seeks to demonstrate that philosophy is itself a religion when both are reduced to anthropological terms. He says:

> My work . . . contains, and applies in the concrete, the principle of a new philosophy suited--not to the schools, but--to man. Yes, it contains that principle, but only by _evolving_ it out of the very core of religion; hence, be it said in passing, the new philosophy can no longer, like the old Catholic and modern Protestant scholasticism, fall into the temptation to prove its agreement with Christian dogmas; on the contrary, being evolved from the nature of religion, it has in itself

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[1] _Ibid._

[2] _Essence of Christianity_, p. xl.

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> the true essence of religion,--is, in its very quality as a philosophy, a religion also.[1]

Feuerbach believes that Christianity is opposed to the entire situation of the modern world. Christianity is negated even by those who continue to believe firmly in it. It is denied in life and in science, in art and in industry. If, in practice, man and work have replaced the Christian and prayer, theoretically the essence of man must replace the divine. Christianity has been reduced to a Sunday affair, it has vanished out of the everyday life of man, because

> it is nothing more than a fixed idea, in flagrant contradiction with our fire and life assurance companies, our railroads and steam carriages, our picture and sculpture galleries, our military and industrial schools, our theaters and scientific museums.[2]

For Feuerbach the criticism of religion is justified, because in divesting God of the good qualities of the human species falsely attributed to him, it enriches and liberates mankind. Like all rationalist philosophers of the time, Feuerbach tends to believe that the act of liberation can be brought about through a simple reformation of people's consciousness.

To sum up Feuerbach's critique of religion: The real world, the world which counts, is found right here in the material things available to our senses and passions. Man has a certain distinctive reality of his own, in this sensuous world. He is able to communicate, and to engage in common projects. Man has a community type of existence due to the sharing of aims and passions. In this community he develops certain ideals. He wants to protect those ideals when they are under attack from bad social conditions. Therefore, he projects them, separates them from himself, or, in terms of Hegel's dialectic, he alienates them from his everyday existence. He puts his moral ideals out a great distance from himself and regards them as a separate reality, or as God. Therefore, the content and substance of religion are entirely human. The key to the mystery of the divine being is the human being, the secret of theology is anthropology. In religion man projects his own nature or nature itself into something superhuman and supernatural. Feuerbach reverses the biblical statement "God created man in his own image"[1] into man created God in his own image. He says: "Man first unconsciously and involuntarily creates God in his own image, and after this God consciously and voluntarily creates man in his own image."[2] What we have to do, says Feuerbach, is to recover the purely human meaning of religion. We have to bring religion back to its proper proportions as an expression of human moral aspirations.

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[1] Ibid., pp. xliiif.
[2] Ibid., p. xliv.

Now let us see how far Marx agreed with Feuerbach and in which sense he may be said to have reverted from Feuerbach. Marx repudiated Feuerbach because the latter took as the basis of his philosophy an abstract man, i.e., man apart from his world. According to Marx, Feuerbach's only uncontested merit was his reduction of the absolute spirit to human terms. By his definition of human nature as a naturalistic generic entity, Feuerbach "pushed Hegel aside" without "overcoming him critically". He constructed a man whose reality reflects only the life of bourgeois private individual.

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[1] Genesis 1:27.

[2] Essence of Christianity, op. cit., p. 118.

Marx agreed with Feuerbach's claim that both religion and speculative philosophy are forms of the "alienation of man's essence," but he disagreed with Feuerbach's claim that the human nature underlying this alienation is fully developed, untainted and divine. On the other hand, though rejecting Hegel's idealism, Marx agreed with Hegel that history had not yet become the "*real* history of man--of man as a given subject, but only man's *act of creation*--the *story* of man's *origin*."[1] In short, the divinity, or rather the humanity, of man is something still to be achieved and always to be the result of an achievement. Hence Marx wrote in 1844:

> For Germany the *criticism of religion* is in the main complete, and criticism of religion is the premise of all criticism. The only *practically* possible liberation of Germany is liberation from the standpoint of *the* theory which proclaims man to be the highest essence of man.[2]

In the same year he again wrote:

> Since for the socialist man the *entire so-called history of the world* is nothing but the creation of man through human labor, nothing but the emergence of nature for man, so he has the visible, irrefutable proof of his *birth* through himself, of the *process* of his creation.[3]

Therefore, it is legitimate to say, as Nicholas Lobkowicz points out, that Marx's philosophy of man is a materialist interpretation of Hegel's *Phenomenology* rather than a pendant of Feuerbach's anthropotheistic materialism.[4]

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[1] *Manuscripts*, *op*. *cit*., p. 173.

[2] "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction," *On Religion*, *op*. *cit*., pp. 41, 58.

[3] *Manuscripts*, *op*, *cit*., p. 145.

[4] Cf. "Karl Marx's Attitude Toward Religion," *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 26, No. 3, 1964, p. 319.

Marx's most significant criticism of Feuerbach is that the latter interpreted reality, but didn't change it. In other words, his thought stayed at a theoretical level, and never became *praxis*. As a result Feuerbach remained stuck in the individualism of bourgeois society. Though he saw religion as a projection, he was unable to explain it in terms of the needs of humanity alienated from itself by the social structure. Hence Marx wrote in his "Theses on Feuerbach":

> The standpoint of the old materialism is "civil"
> society; the standpoint of the new is *human*
> society, or socialized humanity.
> The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world,
> in various ways; the point, however, is to change it.[1]

With this philosophical background, Marx started his own critique of religion which he hoped would pave the way for changing the world.

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[1] *On Religion*, *op*. *cit*., p. 72.

CHAPTER III

Marx's Critique of Religion

Aristotle said that to understand a thing one must study its origins. We shall begin this chapter precisely doing that; before expounding Marx's critique of religion, let us first inquire what kind of religious influence Marx had at home and during the school days.

Marx's father, Hirschel Marx, a lawyer, was a descendant of a respected family of rabbis. And yet, in 1816, when the edict went out from the Prussian government that no one of the Jewish faith could serve as a lawyer or an apothecary within the kingdom, Hirschel Marx abandoned his Jewish faith and embraced Protestantism. He entered the Evangelical Church as a convert and received the name Heinrich Marx. Nominally a Christian, he was a free thinker who attended church regularly, sang hymns and paid his tithes. He was prepared to conform to the outward form of the church, but did not believe that any faith was superior to any other. In his view Stoicism, Judaism, Christianity and Hinduism were all equally valid and equally vulnerable. In a letter sent to Karl Marx while he was a student in Bonn, Heinrich Marx said:

> A good support for morality is a simple faith in God. You know that I am the last person to be a fanatic. But sooner or later a man has a real need of this faith, and there are moments in life when even the man who denies God is compelled against his will to pray to the Almighty . . . everyone should submit to what was the faith of Newton, Locke and Leibniz.[1]

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[1] MEGA I i (2), p. 186.

In other words, he professed a belief in reason. His belief in God restricted itself to an acknowledgment of a supreme moral value.[1] Like the poet Heinrich Heine, he considered the sacrament of baptism only as "an entrance card into the community of European culture."[2]

Karl Marx's mother, Henrietta Pressborck, also came from Jewish background. Her father was a well-respected rabbi in Holland. At the time when her husband accepted the Christian faith, her father was still living and therefore she postponed her joining the church. She was baptized in 1825 after her father's death. Unlike her husband she was not educated, and spent most of her time as a good housekeeper.

Karl Marx was born of these parents on May 5, 1818 at Trier in the Rhine province of Prussia. He was the third of the nine children in the family. He received baptism in the Evangelical church on August 26, 1824 and was solemnly confirmed on March 23, 1834. But in a family where baptism was considered only as "an entrance card into the community of European culture," these religious ceremonies didn't mean much. In his childhood he lived a leisurely life of ease and bourgeois respectability, with wealth and servants at his disposal. His mother never bestowed upon him anything comparable to a religious education.[3] He had a special affection toward his father with whom he read Voltaire and Rousseau. At the home of Baron von Westphalen, his neighbour and later father-in-law, he began to appreciate Homer and Shakespeare. In his "Reminiscences of Marx," Wilhelm Liebknecht quotes from a letter of Eleanor, Marx's youngest daughter:

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[1] *Ibid.*

[2] Franz Mehring, *Karl Marx: The Story of His Life*, trans. by Edward Fitzgerald (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1951), p. 3.

[3] In his childhood Marx used to call his mother "angel mother". But as he grew up, he couldn't stand her ignorance and began to hate her. The following quotes from his letters to Engels are typical of his attitude toward her: "Yesterday I received an answer from my old lady. Only 'tender' phrases, but no cash. She also informs me, what I already know, that she is 75 years of age, and suffers under some infirmities of old age". (*MEGA* III iii, p. 43). "Two hours ago I received a telegram that my mother has died. Fate wanted one member of the family. I myself stood already with one foot in the grave. Under present circumstance I (am) at any rate still more needed than the old lady." (*Ibid.*, p. 157).

> Moor's father--for whom Moor had great admiration--was a real eighteenth century 'Frenchman'. He knew Voltaire and Rousseau by heart just as the old Westphalen did Homer and Shakespeare. Moor's astonishing versatility was due without doubt to these 'hereditary' influences.[1]

Contrary to most of the Young Hegelians, Marx never went through a period of "religiousness". People like Hegel, Feuerbach and Bruno Bauer who influenced Marx began their career as students of theology. All of them came from middle-class Protestant families which tried to educate their children as good Christians. Even Engels grew up in a Pietist family. Marx, on the contrary, grew up among men to whom religion never was more than a question of propriety or of expediency. The only place where he might have come into contact with practising Christians was the Friedrich Wilhelm Gymnasium in Trier which he attended for five years.

Since Marx's ideas were to have such a revolutionary impact on the world, it is important to watch them as they first rose to the surface. Some of the essays he wrote for his *Abitur*, the German school leaving examination, permit us to watch them while they were being formed.[1] Because these essays reflect his religious attitude, and because many of the ideas he presented to his teachers were to be enlarged and given greater resonance in later years, they now deserve our attention.

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[1] *Reminiscences of Marx and Engels* (Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House, n.d.), p. 130. Marx's coal black hair, mustache and beard earned the nickname "Moor" for him.

The essay for German composition, "Reflections of a Youth on Choosing an Occupation," involves a careful study of the purposes of life and man's proper duty to his fellow men. Given free will, a man must strive for an occupation in which he can do the greatest good for the greatest number, and he gravely points out the dangers of alienation and self-deception. It is interesting to note that he employs the word "occupation" (Beruf) almost in the sense of a profession of faith. The task given to man is to choose a way of life which will best serve the human race. The theme is one of sacrifice: a man must offer himself up for the greater glory of humanity. He writes:

> To man . . . the Deity gave a general goal, to improve mankind and himself, but left it up to him to seek the means by which he can attain this goal, left it up to him to choose the position in society which is most appropriate and from which he can best elevate both himself and society.[2]

Free will, the commandment of God, the ennoblement of mankind are all implicated in the theme which will eventually encompass the whole field of human conduct. We shall not understand Marx unless we realize that when he became a revolutionary, he was carrying out the injunctions of his youthful essay, for he felt that he was choosing the position in society in which he could best serve mankind.

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[1] These essays were written between August 10 and 16, 1835. Though they were written under pressure, in considerable haste, and probably without sufficient preparation, they show him moving easily among ideas, and already in command of an eloquent personal style.

[2] Easton & Guddat, op. cit., p. 35; MEGA I i (2), p. 164.

The essay on religion was titled "The Union of the Faithful with Christ, according to St. John 15:1-14, presented in its Reason and Essence, in its Absolute Necessity and its Effects." Marx notices that corruption and alienation are present in mankind to an intolerable and terrifying degree. No matter how much men strive, they know themselves to be incapable of achieving their purpose without divine help. So he depicts man as a creature at the mercy of his vices, saved only by the mercy of God. Without God men are helpless; with God they become divine. Marx points out that the ultimate proof of this assertion is found in the words of Christ himself in the parable of the Vine and Branches. By loving God, he wrote, men find themselves turning toward their brothers and sacrificing themselves for their brothers. Instead of alienation there is the loving bondage of service and sacrifice. He continues:

> Thus the union with Christ means a most intimate and vital companionship with Him, keeping Him before our eyes and in our hearts, and being permeated by the highest love, so that we can turn our hearts toward our brothers, united with us through Him, and for whom He had sacrificed himself. But this love for Christ is not fruitless; it fills us not only with the purest reverence and highest respect for Him, but also has the effect of making us keep his commandments in that we sacrifice ourselves for each other and are virtuous, but virtuous only out of love for Him.[1]

In this way Marx resolves the theme of virtue by defining it in both divine and human terms, simultaneously bringing divinity down to earth and raising humanity to the level of divine. According to Marx, Christian virtue, being free of all earthly attachments, acts as God's agent in the redemption of mankind. By virtue men become divine, while in no way losing their humanity. In fact virtue makes them only more human, more loving, and more understanding. He brings all themes together in this final statement:

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[1] Karl Marx: On Religion, ed. & trans. by Saul K. Padover (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1974), p. 5; MEGA I i (2), p. 173.

> Thus the union with Christ imparts an inner exaltation, comfort in suffering, calm trust, and a heart full of love for humankind, open to everything noble, everything great, not out of ambition but for the sake of Christ. Thus the union with Christ imparts a joyousness which the Epicurean in his frivolous philosophy and the deep thinker in his most arcane science have vainly tried to snatch at, but which the soul can attain only through its unrestrained and childlike Union with Christ and God, which alone makes life more beautiful and exalted.[1]

It is true that Marx has treated the subject of the union of believers with Christ with more sympathy than what we would expect of him. However, if we carefully examine the essay we will find that even at the age of seventeen he was unable to approach religion otherwise than as an invitation to self-improvement. Though the instructor praised the essay in general, he was not satisfied with the specific issues which the essay proclaimed. The instructor's comment reads:

> An essay rich in thought, glowing, forceful, deserving of every praise, even though the Essence of the Union [with Christ] under consideration is not given and the Reason for it is conceived only one-sidely and its Necessity demonstrated only meagerly.[2]

Marx was a Christian, and when he turned against Christianity, as Robert Payne observes, he brought to his ideas of social justice the same passion for atonement and same horror of alienation which characterize this essay.[3]

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[1] Ibid., p. 6; MEGA I i (2), p. 174.

[2] Ibid., p. 3; MEGA I i (2), p. 174.

[3] Cf. Robert Payne, Marx (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), p. 42.

The final statement of the essay which we quoted is significant here, for it contains a sharp attack on Epicurus and his "frivolous philosophy". There is a striking contrast between this statement and Marx's doctoral dissertation which we discussed earlier.[1] Whereas in the former he condemns Epicurus in the latter he extols him. During the period of six years between the writing of the essay and the dissertation Marx's thoughts went through several stages of evolution.[2] Epicurus represents the climax of that evolution and becomes the turning point of Marx's thinking. The aim of his dissertation was to demonstrate that Epicurean philosophy of nature was basically different from the Democritean philosophy of nature. Marx found that it was essential to prove this difference because almost all Graeco-Roman philosophers since the time of Epicurus held the view that Epicurus had copied his philosophy of nature from Democritus. The basis of this critique was laid by Cicero and Plutarch, and their view had been kept alive even in Marx's time. Accordingly, in the section on "Judgments Concerning the Relationship of Democritean and Epicurean Physics,"[3] in the first part of the dissertation, Marx summarizes the main judgments formulated against Epicurus during the past centuries.

This unfavorable opinion about Epicurus raised by older writers is found again in the church fathers. For example, Marx cites a passage from Clement of Alexandria, a church father who with regard to Epicurus deserves prominent mention, because he re-interprets St. Paul's general warning against philosophy as a specific warning against Epicurean

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[1] Vide supra, pp. 35ff.
[2] Vide supra, pp. 33ff.
[3] Livergood, op. cit., pp. 65ff; MEGA I i (1), pp. 15ff.

Philosophy. The citation is from *The Stromata* where Clement quotes Colossians 2:8 and makes an interpretation of it:

> Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ, [by which Paul is] branding not all philosophy, but the Epicurean, which Paul mentions in the Acts of the Apostles [17:18], which abolishes providence . . . [*sic*] and whatever other philosophy honours the elements, but places not over them the efficient cause, nor apprehends the Creator.[1]

Epicurean philosophy is regarded by Clement as the prototype of all philosophies which do not apprehend the Creator. In the preparatory studies of the dissertation Marx makes a sarcastic comment about Clement's interpretation of Paul: "It is a good thing that those philosophers who did not indulge in fancies about God are rejected,"[2] meaning indirectly only those philosophers who indulge in fancies about God are acceptable to Clement. This comment is only understandable with reference to the Greek text quoted by Marx. In the phrase, "nor apprehends the Creator", the Greek term for apprehend makes use of the verb φανταζομαι , from which the English word "fantasy" is derived. Apprehension of the Creator is thus ridiculed by Marx as producing fantasies about God. He further comments that modern interpretation of Colossians 2:8 recognizes that Paul had in mind all philosophies and not just the Epicurean philosophy.[1] Whether Clement was right in his interpretation of Paul or whether Marx was right in his understanding of Clement is still a debatable issue and largely beside the point of our discussion here. However, two points are significant: First, Marx rejects the tendency to make a contradistinction between philosophies which "apprehend" a Creator and those which deny His existence. Second, Marx unmasks the idea of a divine Creator as a product of man's fantasy, man's capacity for spinning ideas and images out of his own mind.

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[1] *MEGA* I i (1), p. 58. Marx cites the original Greek text. The English translation is from *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. by Alexander Roberts & James Donaldson, revised by A. Cleveland Coxe (Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1951), p. 311. See also, *Clemens Alexandrinus, Stromata Buch I-VI*, herausgegeben von Otto Stählin, in dritter Auflage neu herausgegeben von Ludwig Früchtel (Akademie-Verlag. Berlin, 1960), p. 33.

[2] *MEGA* I i (1), p. 129.

In his dissertation Marx provided the stimulus for the development of a materialistic-atheistic tradition by setting up the titanic figure of Prometheus[2] as the archetype. When the twenty-three year old Marx called Prometheus "the most eminent saint and martyr in the philosophic calendar," he had in mind a philosophy with the basic creed: "In simple words I hate the pack of gods."[3] According to Marx, Prometheus is opposed to "all divine and earthly gods who do not acknowledge human self-consciousness as the highest divinity."[4] Marx's philosophic calendar therefore contains such a "saint and martyr" who hates the gods and extol man's self-consciousness as the highest divinity. The phrase

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[1] Cf. MEGA I i (1), p. 129. Even today many New Testament scholars hold this view. See, for example, Eduard Lohse, Colossians and Philemon: A Commentary, trans. by William R. Poehlmann & Robert J. Karris, ed. by Helmut Koester (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), pp. 94ff.

[2] Prometheus became the archetype and pattern of defiance of the envy of gods by his theft of fire from heaven in order to use it on earth in the interest of human life and culture. As punishment for his deed, according to Greek legend, Zeus chained him to a rock, where in the daytime an eagle devoured his liver, which, however, always grew again during the night (Cf. Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol. 18, p. 576B).

[3] MEGA I i (1), p. 10; Livergood, op. cit., p. 62. Marx is quoting here from Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound. See, Aeschylus, trans. by Herbert Weir Smyth (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1956), pp. 304, 305.

[4] Ibid.

"saint and martyr" should be understood as an interpretation of Prometheus' answer to Hermes which Marx quotes:

> Be sure of this, I would not change my state
> Of evil fortune for your servitude.
> Better to be the servant of this rock
> Than to be faithful boy to Father Zeus.[1]

In preference to Hermes' servitude as faithful boy to Father Zeus, Prometheus would rather be the "servant to this rock" to which he is bound by way of punishment. Prometheus' profession is the service of man over against Hermes' service of the gods. The latter enjoys an apparent freedom, whereas the former is subjected to eternal sufferings and bondage. But in these sufferings and bondage he is free, because it is his own conscious and deliberate choice. His martyrdom for the sake of man makes him the real saint. Prometheus thus becomes the representative of a view of man and the world that sets up his own self-consciousness as the ultimate reality and supreme good. Prometheus' act is, according to Marx, the true task of philosophy. Just as Prometheus, having stolen fire from heaven, begins to build houses and to establish himself on earth, so philosophy, having embraced the whole world, should rebel against the world of phenomena.[2]

In the "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction," we find another reference to the tragic aspects of Prometheus' act. There, the gods of Greece are said to have already been "tragically wounded to death in Aeschylus' Prometheus Bond."[3] In other words, the real victim in the tragedy is not the human saint and martyr Prometheus, but rather the gods whose dominance has been fatally undermined by man's disbelief.

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[1] Ibid. See also, Aeschylus, op. cit., pp. 302, 303.
[2] Cf. MEGA I i (1), p. 131.
[3] On Religion, op. cit., p. 46.

Prometheus' challenging answer to Hermes, the servant of gods, is applied to the actual political situation at the time of writing the dissertation, i.e., March 1841. At this time the government had begun to withdraw the semi-official support it used to give to the Young Hegelians.[1] It encouraged the theological faculty of Bonn to reject the appointment of Marx's friend Bruno Bauer, one of the leading figures among the Young Hegelians, as professor. Thus, by the "poor March hares, who rejoice over the apparently worsened social position of philosophy"[2] Marx meant all those in the universities who collaborated with the government by interfering in the academic freedom of the Young Hegelian philosophers. The political servitude of the theological faculty is compared by Marx to Hermes' servitude to Father Zeus. Prometheus' challenging answer to Hermes should therefore be read as an indirect assault on the analoguos position of Christianity in the nineteenth century.

In the foregoing paragraphs we found that Marx's critical attitude toward religion can be traced back to his student days. In Chapter II we already discussed specific aspects of the philosophies of Hegel and Feuerbach which had direct impact upon Marx's critique of religion. Having set the stage we shall now proceed with his own critique. In doing so, first we will examine Marx's critique of religion in general, and then we will discuss his criticism of Christianity in particular.

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[1] Franz Mehring, op. cit., pp. 15, 21-23, 26. Originally Marx had the idea of an academic career. Bruno Bauer wanted very much to have him as his associate at Bonn. But because of the unfavorable political situation Marx turned his mind toward Journalism.

[2] MEGA I i (1), p. 10; Livergood, op. cit., p. 62.

According to Marx and Engels, all religions reflect the fact that man's life is controlled by external powers over which he has no control. Engels put it this way:

> All religion . . . is nothing but the fantastic reflection in men's minds of those external forces which control their daily life, a reflection in which the terrestrial forces assume the form of supernatural forces.[1]

He, then makes a contrast between primitive religions and contemporary religions. Whereas in the primitive society it was the power of nature which controlled man, in the modern world it is the forces of the social system which exercise this external dominance:

> In the beginnings of history it was the forces of nature which were first so reflected and which in the course of further evolution underwent the most manifold and varied personifications among the various peoples. . . .But it is not long before, side by side with the forces of nature, social forces begin to be active--forces which confront man as equally alien and at first equally inexplicable, dominating him with the same apparent natural necessity as the forces of nature themselves. The fantastic figures, which at first only reflected the mysterious forces of nature, at this point acquire social attributes, become representatives of the forces of history.[2]

It is not only before nature that man is powerless; he is also overwhelmed by society, so that the process of society appear to man as strange and terrible divinities. Thus the "fetishism of commodities" comes to replace the fetishism of nature.[3] Taking Feuerbach's lead,[4] Marx developed a theory of religious alienation--that man projects his own perfection into the supernatural and calls the sum of these qualities

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[1] Engels, "Anti-Dühring," On Religion, op. cit., p. 147.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Vide supra, p. 21.
[4] Vide supra, pp. 45ff.

"God". This process, Marx said, actually alienates man from himself.

But Marx didn't stop at the recognition of this alienation. He went beyond Feuerbach in asserting that it is the economic and social forces that drive man to create illusions such as God. Herein lies the genius of Marx. Merely recognizing the fact that man is alienated from himself does no good as long as man is not emancipated from the underlying causes of alienation found in the economic order. For "it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness."[1] Engels elaborated this point further:

> Mere knowledge . . . is not enough to bring social forces under the domination of society. What is above all necessary for this, is a social *act*. And when this act has been accomplished, when society, by taking possession of all means of production and using them on a planned basis, has freed itself and all its members from the bondage in which they are now held by these means of production which they themselves have produced but which confront them as an irresistible alien force, . . . only then will the last alien force which is still reflected in religion vanish; and with it will also vanish the religious reflection itself, for the simple reason that then there will be nothing left to reflect.[2]

Marx's analysis of the human predicament and alienation leads him from the criticism of religion to the criticism of society. Religion cannot be disposed of, nor can the problem which begets religion be solved, without a radical change of the society and the economic system. Feuerbach's calculation was wrong when he believed that mere criticism of religion could remove religion from the minds of the people. This observation is implied in the following humorous statement Marx makes:

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[1] Marx, "Preface to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy," *Marx & Engels: Selected Works*, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

[2] Engels, "Anti-Dühring," *On Religion*, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

> Once upon a time an honest fellow had the idea that men were drowned in water only because they were possessed with the idea of gravity. If they were to knock this idea out of their heads, say by stating it to be a superstition, a religious idea, they would be sublimely proof against any danger from water. His whole life long he fought against the illusion of gravity, of whose harmful results all statistics brought him new and manifold evidence. This honest fellow was the type of the new revolutionary philosophers in Germany.[1]

Marx sees the criticism of religion only as a preliminary step to the criticism of society, and criticism of society goes hand in hand with the revolutionary political action which not only changes society but also destroys the basis of religion.

Feuerbach considered the concept of God to derive from the thought and temperament of the individual. On the other hand, Marx asks what conditions particular individuals to develop religious concepts and continue to believe in them. Whereas Feuerbach understood the consciousness of God as man's consciousness of himself, Marx investigates the nature of the man who can develop the self-consciousness only in an alienated way. The problem is carried one stage further:

> The basis of irreligious criticism is: *Man makes religion*, religion does not make man. In other words, religion is the self-consciousness and self-feeling of man who has either not yet found himself or has already lost himself again. But *man* is no abstract being squatting outside the world. Man is *the world of man*, the state, society. This state, this society, produce religion, *a reversed world-consciousness*, because they are *a reversed world*.[2]

This is the fundamental principle of Marx's critique of religion. State and society in their specific, imperfect, unjust, inhuman form produce in man a reversed or perverted (*verkehrt*) consciousness of himself, corresponding to man's own perversion, i.e., religious consciousness.

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[1] Marx & Engels, *The German Ideology*, *op. cit.*, p.2.

[2] Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction," *On Religion*, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

In the *Manuscripts* Marx writes:

> If I *know* religion as *alienated* human self-consciousness, then what I know in it as religion is not my self-consciousness, but my alienated self-consciousness confirmed in it. I therefore know my own self, the self-consciousness that belongs to its very nature, confirmed not in *religion* but rather in *annihilated* and superseded religion.[1]

The task therefore changes from traditional criticism of religion to practical criticism of social and political conditions which produce and maintain religious consciousness. Religion is described as the "moral sanction," the "solemn completion," and the "universal ground for consolation and justification" for this world.[2] This means religion is an integral part of this perverted world, and not simply the perverted consciousness belonging to it. It is necessary as man's consolation in this bad world, to make the perverted world tolerable and to justify it. Without religion this world could not carry on, and for this reason it spontaneously springs up again and again out of the inhuman conditions of life. Therefore Marx finds that religion is still the better part in a bad whole. He says:

> *Religious* distress is at the same time the *expression* of real distress and the *protest* against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the *opium* of the people.[3]

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[1] *Manuscripts*, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

[2] Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction," *On Religion*, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 42. When Marx referred to religion in the statement, "It is the opium of the people," he was being considerably more merciful and understanding than contemporary Communists. The German text reads: "*Sie ist das Opium des Volkes*" [*MEGA* I i (1), p. 607]. Note that Marx says "*of* the people," not "*for* the people." Allegedly, it was Lenin who changed the phrase to "for the people." For sources of Marx's use of the term "opium," see, Helmut Gollwitzer, *The Christian Faith and the Marxist Criticism of Religion*, trans. by David Cairns (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), pp. 15ff.

Taking this often quoted passage as some sort of vulgar atheism or as a rejection of religion *per se*, or even as an attack upon religion, constitutes a complete distortion. It is as though one quoted the Psalmist saying "There is no God." He did say that, of course, but if one wishes to convey his thought one should complete the sentence, "The fool says in his heart, 'there is no God.'"[1] As Surjit Singh points out, from the history of the use of Marx's opium statement it would appear that the followers of Marx have been doped by it in so far as they think that this is Marx's last word on religion.[2]

Unless we give careful attention to Marx's description of religion as opium we will miss the point. Religion is described as the *expression* of this world's distress, as the "sigh of the oppressed creature". Mention has already been made that this phrase occurs in Feuerbach's quotation from Sebastian Frank von Wörd: "God is an unutterable sigh, lying in the depths of the heart."[3] However, religion is at the same time also a *protest* against this distress, a protest which in fact, according to Marx's view, remains vain and ineffectual because it diverts attention from this world and focuses hope on the next. Only after the religious phenomenon has been described as a sigh which awakens concern and as a protest which calls forth sympathy is it criticized as opium, a sedative and narcotic. Its narcotic effect stems from the fact that it teaches an acceptance of earthly unhappiness by holding out a promise of transcendental happiness. This is what Marx means when he says that religion is the "spirit of a spiritless situation." It takes on an increasingly spiritual and ethereal form, the more spiritless the material world becomes, the more it forces the human spirit toward an "other world." "The struggle against religion is therefore mediately the fight against *the other world*, of which religion is the spiritual aroma."[1] Thus the denial of religion is not an end in itself, but a fighting doctrine; its source is not a theoretical interest for truth, but the practical interest in the changing of this world into a human one.

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[1] Psalm 14:1.

[2] Cf. Surjit Singh, *Communism, Christianity, Democracy* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1965), p. 51.

[3] *Vide supra*, p. 48.

At any rate religion can make people content in their soul, in their consciousness, but in an imaginary way and not in any complete and real way. The medicine it offers cannot help to cure the disease from which society and man are suffering; it can only help to alleviate the pain. It therefore seems to Marx to be pointless simply to take this pain relieving drug away from man, quite apart from the fact that as long as the disease lasts it would be futile. It is instead a question of curing the disease itself and thus making the opiate superfluous. Marx poignantly says:

> The abolition of religion as the *illusory* happiness of the people is required for their *real* happiness. The demand to give up the illusions about its condition is the *demand to give up a condition which needs illusions*. The criticism of religion is therefore *in embryo the criticism of the vale of woe*, the *halo* of which is religion. . . . The immediate *task of philosophy*, which is at the service of history, once the *saintly form* of human self-alienation has been unmasked, is to unmask self-alienation in its *unholy forms*. Thus the criticism of heaven turns into the criticism of the earth, the *criticism of religion* into the *criticism of right* and the *criticism of theology* into the *criticism of politics*.[2]

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[1] Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction," *On Religion*, *op*. *cit*., p. 42.

[2] *Ibid*.

Marx attempts in his early writings to achieve a combination of self-consciousness and historical practice which would supersede all previous philosophy. In the first thesis on Feuerbach, Marx says:

> The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism--that of Feuerbach included--is that the thing (Gegenstand), reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the object (Objekt) or of contemplation (Anschauung), but not as human sensuous activity, practice, not subjectively.[1]

The chief sense of "practice" here is intended to be "revolutionary," "practical-critical" activity. In the revolutionary action of the proletariat, once it has been aroused and has awakened to political consciousness, the historical substance would at once comprehend itself and act with corresponding consciousness. Here Marx hoped not only to discover but to penetrate that reality which up till then had been interpreted in many different ways by philosophers. This hope is accentuated in theses IV & XI:

> Feuerbach starts out from the fact of religious self-alienation, the duplication of the world into a religious, imaginary world and a real one. His work consists in the dissolution of the religious world into its secular basis. He overlooks the fact that after this work is completed the chief thing still remains to be done. For the fact that the secular foundation detaches itself from itself and establishes itself in the clouds as an independent realm is really only to be explained by the self-clevage and self-contradictoriness of this secular basis. The latter must itself, therefore, first be understood in its contradiction, and then revolutionized in practice by the removal of the contradiction. Thus, for instance, once the earthly family is discovered to be the secret of the holy family, the former must then itself be criticized in theory and revolutionized in practice.
> The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways: the point, however, is to change it.[2]

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[1] On Religion, op. cit., p. 69.
[2] Ibid., pp. 70, 72.

Thus, Feuerbach's synthesis of thought and contemplation is replaced by a synthesis of self-consciousness and revolutionary action.

Thus, we find that Marx's criticism of religion moves on two levels. That is, first, the unmasking of religion which, according to Marx, has been mainly completed by his predecessors, especially by Feuerbach. But as this unmasking of religion reveals that religion is "true," in the sense that it is an invention of man to compensate for and to sublimate his real wretchedness, a second kind of criticism has to follow: religion has to be made false, i.e., the secular world has to be changed. Once the secular world is discovered to be the source of religious ideas, it must be "criticized in theory and revolutionized in practice."

Of these two tasks, Marx had seen the second quite clearly as early as 1844: radical, human emancipation could only be effected by a class "with radical chains," the industrial proletariat, through whose action all men would be liberated at the same time, because it can only free itself as a class by trying to end every form of domination of man by man and exploitation of man by man.[1] Once these inhuman social conditions are removed, poverty will also disappear and with it religion which was its inevitable expression and ineffectual protest.

The self-contradictoriness of the secular basis of religion, namely, the antagonistic structure of society and the contradictory character of the bourgeois political economy, was again examined by Marx in his magnum opus, Capital. The critique of religion contained in the early writings is continued, at least indirectly, in various sections of Capital. The first chapter of Capital I contains the famous section on "The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof" which deals directly with the problem of religious alienation. In a manufacturing society the conditions of the individual seem to depend on things, on commodities and the laws of their movement in the market. A mysterious power transforms the results of the human labour into "commodities," endows them with "value," and makes them exchangeable for other commodities of equal value. This is the mystery which Marx tries to elucidate in the passages from Capital that we quoted earlier.[1]

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[1] Cf. Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction," On Religion, op. cit., pp. 56f.

The fetishistic character of the commodities and the fact that the world of commodities develops an independence from the individual--who is nonetheless a partner in work and production--not only, according to Marx, present an analogy to religious alienation, but also forms basis for the latter's continuance. As long as men's social relations are seen by them as relationships between "commodities," and as long as their own society confronts them as a complex of objective relations with its own inflexible laws, men will not stop inventing a transcendental divine being far beyond this society, just as they need a political power (the State) to control and regulate it. Marx hopes religion will be overcome by a transformation of the method of production which would permit human relationships to be both "intelligible" and "reasonable":

> The religious reflex of the real world can, in any case, only then finally vanish, when the practical relations of everyday life offer to man none but perfectly intelligible and reasonable relations with regard to his fellowmen and to Nature. The life process of society, which is based on the process of material production, does not strip off its mystical veil until it is treated as production by freely associated men, and is consciously

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[1] Vide supra, p. 21.

> regulated by them in accordance with a settled plan.[1]

Marx is offering here an outline of an ordered society in which the relations of men to one another and to nature are both clearly recognizable and rationally acceptable. This ordered society can be attained, according to Marx, only by individuals voluntarily forming themselves into associations to take over production and distribution. Then the religious reflex of the real world will finally vanish. The task therefore is not to fight religion but, more clearly stated here than before, to set up a society in which religious consciousness will die out. Suffering and mystery, to which Feuerbach attributed the existence of religion, are now seen more precisely as the sorrows brought about by enforced, unreasonable, incomprehensible and alien conditions of life (social structure). The accent is shifted from emotional to intellectual suffering, without losing sight of the reality of that suffering.[2]

Engels found that while institutionalized religion generally seeks to defend the _status quo_, the content of the religious affirmations has its own logic, and may appeal to, and does appeal to, different classes. In other words, the ruling classes may wish to employ religious belief and feeling as forces for the retention of their power; but religion being a mass phenomenon that transcends classes, may serve as the justification for and inspiration of vast popular movements that are revolutionary. Marxism, thus, emphasizes the revolutionary quality of early Christianity, and stresses the significant contrast between early and late Christianity. We can illuminate this point from some classical Marxist writings. In an essay, "On the History of Early Christianity," Engels wrote:

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[1] _Capital_, Vol. I, _op. cit._, pp. 79f.
[2] Iring Fetscher, "Developments in the Marxist Critique of Religion," _Concilium_, Vol. 16, _op. cit._, pp. 146ff.

> The history of early Christianity has notable points of resemblance with the modern working class movement. Like the latter, Christianity was originally a movement of oppressed people: it first appeared as the religion of slaves and emancipated slaves, of poor people deprived of all rights, of peoples subjugated or dispersed by Rome. Both Christianity and the workers' socialism preach forthcoming salvation from bondage and misery; Christianity places this salvation in a life beyond, after death, in heaven; socialism places it in this world, in a transformation of society. Both are persecuted and baited, their adherents are despised and made the objects of exclusive laws, the former as enemies of the human race, the latter as enemies of the state, enemies of religion, the family, social order. And in spite of all persecution, nay, even spurred on by it, they forge victoriously, irresistibly ahead. Three hundred years after its appearance Christianity was the recognized state religion in the Roman World Empire, and in barely sixty years socialism has won itself a position which makes its victory absolutely certain.[1]

Karl Kautsky, one of the leading figures of the Second International, maintained that Christianity was originally a revolutionary organization. The liberation from poverty which it proclaimed was at first thought of quite realistically. It was to take place in the world and not in heaven. The transference of liberation to heaven only took place later.[2]

Marx and Engels do not mean that priests are necessarily impostors who cunningly divert the workers' attention from their grievances by telling them lies about God and a spiritual world. Still less do they mean that men could be "cured" of their religious beliefs by proving them false, as men might possibly be cured of drug addiction by lectures about the injury it does to them. Rather, the central idea is that religion is a social and psychological mechanism that makes the lives of unhappy men bearable to themselves and serves as a justification for the sufferings they undergo. The sufferings themselves are due to social maladjustments, and if these were remedied, religion would lose its *raison d'etre* and cease to exist. Therefore, Marx did not believe that a direct attack against religion would ever work. Since religion is only the symptom of a more basic discrepancy, the demise of religion cannot be hastened. Any direct struggle against religion appeared to Marx as useless and misplaced: useless, because religion simply cannot be abolished as long as the world is not put straight; misplaced, because the real enemy is the perverted social order of which, as Marx put it, religion is only the spiritual aroma.[1] Any efficient treatment has to be radical, i.e., to reach the very roots of the evil. In the *Manuscripts*, Marx writes:

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[1] On Religion, op. cit., p. 316.

[2] Cf. Karl Kautsky, Foundations of Christianity, trans. by Henry F. Mins (New York: Russell & Russell, 1953), pp. 351ff.

> Atheism . . . has no longer any meaning, for atheism is a *negation of God*, and postulates the *existence of man* through this megation; but socialism as socialism no longer stands in any need of such a mediation. It proceeds from the *practically and theoretically* sensous consciousness of man and of nature as the *essence*. Socialism is man's *positive self-consciousness*.[2]

In the same year he wrote again:

> . . . atheism, being the supersession of God, is the advent of theoretic humanism, and communism, as the supersession of the private property, is the vindication of real human life as man's possession and thus the advent of practical humanism (or just as atheism is humanism mediated with itself through the supersession of religion, whilst communism is humanism mediated with itself through the supersession of private property). Only through the supersession of this mediation--which is itself, however, a necessary premise--does positively self-deriving humanism, *positive humanism*, come into being.[3]

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[1] Cf. Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction," *On Religion*, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

[2] *Manuscripts*, *op. cit.*, pp. 145f.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 187.

Marx believes that a full reappropriation of what man has alienated from himself cannot be achieved by a mere annulment of God, but only by an annulment of the social structure of private property which produces the need for God. Thus, for Marx to be human is not to be something, but to do something.

Marxism, manifesting a profound humanism as the heart of its inspiration, naturally opposes religious persecution. It opposes coercive methods aimed at religion. This was, incidentally, one of the main points of conflict between Marxism and Anarchism. As Herbert Aptheker points out, in its attitude toward religion, Marxism was created not only in combat with capitalism of the Right but also with the Anarchism, Blanquism and terrorism of the ultra-left.[1] The few references to religion made by Marx in his later years indicate that, in spite of his lack of interest in this kind of problem, his view on religion and atheism did not change as the years passed. Thus, for instance, in his "Critique of the Gotha Programme" (1875), Marx argues: "Everyone should be able to attend to his religious as well as his bodily needs without the police sticking their noses in."[2]

Before we proceed with Marx's critique of Christianity in particular, let us examine briefly how Lenin's critique of religion differs from that of Marx. It is important to note this distinction, because the religious persecutions which took place in Russia under the dictatorship of Lenin are contrary to the spirit of Marx, as is evident from the last statement of the preceding paragraph. The key to understand Lenin's attitude toward religion is his materialism. Lenin's materialism is a combination of Marx's materialism[1] and a materialistic world view based on The Riddle of the Universe by Ernst Haeckel,[2] the German philosopher and biologist. In this combination, the materialistic world view was especially strong. Haeckel's materialism came from his efforts to apply the achievements of natural science to all areas of life. This materialistic world view was to replace religion. From Haeckel's standpoint, therefore, it was logical to call for an ideological struggle against religion. His critique of religion was philosophical and scientistic--religion was a rival to the "true" and "scientific" world view.

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[1] Cf. Herbert Aptheker, The Urgency of Marxist-Christian Dialogue (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 7.

[2] Marx & Engels: Selected Works, op. cit., p. 333.

Lenin was not satisfied with the materialism of Marx, but expanded his theory by adding a materialistic world view. Marx's critique of religion was replaced by the eighteenth century popular critique of religion, clergy, and church, evidently because it was more effective as a political weapon. Lenin himself admits that Marx's critique of religion did not have the same propagandistic effect as that of the eighteenth century Enlightenment:

> A Marxist could not make a worse mistake than to think that the many millions of people (particularly peasants and artisans) who are condemned by modern society to ignorance, illiteracy and prejudices can extricate themselves from this ignorance only by following the straight line of purely Marxist education.[3]

For this reason, Lenin urges the distribution of "militant atheist literature" from the eighteenth century. His emphasis of a materialistic world view, after the model of Haeckel, may therefore be explained on the basis of the political need for effective weapons against contemporary, conservative churches.[1]

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[1] Vide supra, pp. 42f.

[2] Trans. by Joseph McCabe (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1900).

[3] V. I. Lenin, Religion (New York: International Publishers, 1935), p. 31.

The simultaneous influence of Marx and Haeckel has created certain amount of ambiguity in Lenin's own position, as far as some crucial questions are concerned. For example, should Marxism actively oppose religion, or will religion fade away of itself? From Haeckel's point of view religion and science are mutually contradictory, in as much as the materialistic world view is the scientific counterpart of religion. In so far as Lenin shared this view, he naturally called for attacks on religion. Those who believe in God are regarded as ignorant and backward people in need of instruction. Instead of meeting Christians with tolerance and respect, they are met with persecution in the form of "enlightenment." Lenin said:

> Our programme is based entirely on scientific--to be more precise--upon a materialist world conception. In explaining our programme, therefore, we must necessarily explain the actual historical and economic roots of the religious fog. Our programme necessarily includes the propaganda of atheism. The publication of related scientific literature (which up till now has been strictly forbidden and persecuted by the autocratic feudal government) must now form one of the items of our party work.[2]

On the other hand, Marx's sociological critique of religion also influenced Lenin. He, like Marx, opposed the attempts of Bakunin and his anarchist disciples to put the struggle against religion in the center of the class struggle. The question of religion must not be the principle issue that separates the religious and non-religious workers into two camps and weakens the class struggle. Instead the struggle must be focused on "the social roots of religion," i.e., capitalism.[1]

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[1] The political motivation for an atheistic and materialistic world view can be clearly seen in Lenin's Materialism and Empirico-Criticism, trans. by David Kvitko (New York: International Publishers, 1927).

[2] Lenin, "Socialism and Religion," Religion, op. cit., pp. 9f.

When Lenin combined Marx's sociological critique of religion with anti-religious belief in science, the result was a drastic intensification of the critique of religion. Religion as an unscientific world view is entirely negative. According to Lenin, the idea of God is simply a weapon in the hands of the oppressors:

> The idea of god has *always* lulled and blunted "social emotions," and substituted concern for the dead for interest in the living. It has *always* involved the idea of slavery (of the worst and most hopeless slavery). The idea of god has never "united the individual with society." It has always bound the oppressed *classes* by faith in the divinity to submission to their *oppressors*.[2]

The tendency toward intolerance became stronger because of Lenin's theory about the Communist Party as an elite, especially as his successors interpreted it. The function of the party was to indoctrinate a revolutionary consciousness into the proletariat. It is the perils of this intolerance and aggression inherent in such a cleavage between the enlightened party and the unenlightened masses that we find in the subsequent developments in Russia.

In this respect, Mao Tse-tung is closer to Marx than Lenin is. Mao rejects Lenin's insistence on a "struggle against religion, and accepts the idea that religion will disappear once it is deprived of its social basis. Mao said: "It is the peasants who made the idols, and when the time comes they will cast the idols aside with their own hands; there is no need for any one else to do it for them prematurely."[3]

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[1] Cf. Lenin, "The Attitude of the Workers' Party Towards Religion," *Religion*, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

[2] Lenin, "Letter to A.M. Gorky," *Religion*, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

[3] "Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan," *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* (4 vols.; Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1965), Vol. I, p. 46.

This does not mean that he excludes the possibility of a conflict between the party and religion, because the socialist revolution is something which involves the life of the entire society. The significant point here is that this conflict is social and political (in the style of Marx) rather than philosophical and scientistic (in the style of Haeckel and Lenin). This appears clearly in the example Mao gives on how he conducts his propaganda against religion:

> The gods? Worship them by all means. But if you had only Lord Kuan and the Goddess of Mercy and no peasant association, could you have overthrown the local tyrants and evil gentry? The gods and goddesses are indeed miserable objects. You have worshipped them for centuries, and they have not overthrown a single one of the local tyrants or evil gentry for you! Now you want to have your rent reduced. Let me ask, how will you go about it? Will you believe in the gods or in the peasant association?[1]

On the whole, Mao's critique of religion is essentially sociological and political, as is indicated in his principle: "If religion doesn't interfere with the People's Republic, the People's Republic will not interfere with it."[2]

We shall now turn our attention to Marx's critique of Christianity in particular. Marx's main target was not God but religion, and chiefly Christianity which he felt was an obstacle to man's self-realization. In other words, in Marxism, propaganda against the church did not develop out of a denial of God and his work, or from a denial of the Gospel and its spiritual power. As a matter of fact, Engels declares of the early Christian writings: "they could just as well have been written by one of the prophetically minded enthusiastic of the International."[1] It grew rather from an opposition to the church as a definite socio-political form which in the name of so-called religion defended the old social order with all its injustices, its cultural backwardness, and its conservative immobility.

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[1] Ibid., p. 47.

[2] Cited by Richard C. Bush, Jr., Religion in Communist China (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970), p. 399.

Mention has already been made that Marx and Engels were critically aware of the significant contrast between early and late Christianity.[2] Here let us examine more specifically how Marx found Christianity justifying the existing order. Marx's criticism is that the church taught the masses that the established order is willed by God and that, as obedient and submissive subjects, they should resign themselves to it. The doctrine of original sin has been used for this purpose. St. Augustine wrote in his City of God that God introduced slavery into the world as a punishment for original sin. To seek, therefore, to abolish slavery would be to rebel against the will of God.[3] The German church of Marx's time literally followed this statement. They taught that "order" was given by God, and therefore any attempt to interfere with it was a sin against God. Religion seemed to be a part of the "superstructure" which sanctioned the existing order, promised rewards in heaven for enduring the pain on earth, and therefore suppressed any attempt to change the real social condition of this world. So Marx saw a parallel between the way the British and French used guns to force opium on the Chinese people in the midnineteenth century and the way the Christian church "used" religion to deaden the social awareness of the working people. Hence the critique that Christianity's function is something by which the proletariat is rendered incapable of protesting its own exploitation.

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[1] "On the History of Early Christianity," On Religion, op. cit., p. 334.

[2] Vide supra, p. 76.

[3] Cf. St. Augustine, City of God, ed. by Vernon Bourke (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1958), pp. 460ff.

Marx and Engels point out that Christianity is grounded not in a political, but in an eschatological vision--the second coming of Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom of God. Jesus and his disciples expected that this eschatological vision will be realized within the lifetime of their own generation. Accordingly, the function of the teaching of Jesus was to prepare men for the second coming, and not to root them in an existence whose nature is basically corrupted.[1] Since the second coming didn't materialize in their time, Marx contends, early Christians began to abandon the teaching of Jesus. Marx seems to enjoy it thoroughly when he asks:

> Do you offer your right cheek when you are struck upon the left, or do you not institute proceedings for assault? Yet the Gospel forbids that. . . .Are not most of your court proceedings and the majority of civil laws concerned with property? But you have been told that your treasure is not of this world.[2]

When the much expected Kingdom of God didn't realize, Christianity began to accept its given lot with the conviction that one is to render to Caesar what is his own and to submit to authroity since it was "ordained by God." But as a result of its willingness to comply with any secular authority which would protect its own religious practice, Christianity ended by accomodating itself through history to everything wicked and

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[1] Engels discusses the *Book of Revelation* in detail to support his contention that the eschatological vision of Christianity actually negates the earthly life of man. Cf. "Bruno Bauer and Early Christianity" & "The Book of Revelation," *On Religion*, *op. cit.*, pp. 198ff & pp. 205ff.

[2] Marx, "The Leading Article of No. 179 of *Kölnische Zeitung*," *On Religion*, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

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degrading in man's social existence. Marx says:

> The social principles of Christianity justified the slavery of Antiquity, glorified the serfdom of the Middle Ages and equally know, when necessary, how to defend the oppression of the proletariat, although they make a pitiful face over it.
> The social principles of Christianity preach the necessity of a ruling and an oppressed class, and all they have for the latter is the pious wish the former will be charitible.
> The social principles of Christianity transfer the consistorial councillor's adjustment of all infamies to heaven and thus justify the further existence of those infamies on earth.
> The social principles of Christianity declare all vile acts of the oppressors against the oppressed to be either the just punishment of original sin and other sins or trials that the Lord in his infinite wisdom imposes on those redeemed.
> The social principles of Christianity preach cowardice, self-contempt, abasement, submission, dejection, in a word all the qualities of the _canaille_; and the proletariat, not wishing to be treated as _canaille_, needs its courage, its self-feeling, its pride and its sense of independence more than its bread.[1]

Marx and Engels never get tired of noting the baseness of organized religion and the extent of its hypocrisy. They maintain that except for its early days Christianity has always been at the side of the oppressor. Marx rarely misses the opportunity to vent his sarcasm at the self-seeking of the religious institutions as when he notes in _Capital_ that "the English Established Church . . . will more readily pardon an attack on 38 of its 39 articles than on 1/39 of its income."[2] The same sneer is carried in the following passage:

> In England even now occasionally in rural districts a labourer is condemned to imprisonment for desecrating the Sabbath, by working in his front garden. The same labourer is punished for breach of contract if he remains

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[1] "The Communism of the Paper _Rheinischer Beobachter_," _On Religion_, _op. cit._, pp. 83f.

[2] _Capital_, Vol. I, _op._ _cit._, p. 10.

> away from his metal, paper, or glass works on the Sunday, even if it be from a religious whim. The orthodox Parliament will hear nothing of Sabbath-breaking if it occurs in the process of expanding capital.[1]

In 1855 during an anti-church demonstration in London, Marx criticized the established church for its callousness and reactionary policy, and said: "The classical saint of Christianity mortified his body for the salvation of the souls of the masses; the modern, educated saint mortifies the bodies of the masses for the salvation of his own soul."[2]

Christianity, throughout its history and especially in the Middle Ages, appears to be an institution bearing the heavy imprint of class power and prestige. Since the time Constantine proclaimed Christianity as the official religion of the State, the church grew as "the most general synthesis and sanction of the existing feudal domination."[3] Clergy obtained a monopoly on learning, which became essentially theological. Even politics and jurisprudence had the influence of theology. Eventually the church passed from a persecuted minority to a powerful oppressor. Christianity "had partaken of the fruits of slavery in the Roman Empire for centuries, and later did nothing to prevent the slave trade of Christians."[4] It required of the small farmer to transfer the title to his land and his independence to its growing power. Thus Christianity hoped to reduce the free farmer to a serf. In these circumstances, "all the generally voiced attacks against feudalism were above all attacks against the Church, and all social and political, revolutionary doctrines were necessarily at the same time and mainly theological heresies."[1] Since the church stood as the ideological sanction of the feudal system, it was necessary to de-mythologize that system before it could be directly destroyed. It was in the context of this need that the Protestant Reformation occurred.

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[1] Ibid., p. 264 note.
[2] "Anti-Church Movement--Demonstration in Hyde Park," On Religion, op. cit., pp. 128f.
[3] Engels, "The Peasant War in Germany," On Religion, op. cit., p. 99.
[4] Engels, "Origin of Family, Private Property and State," Marx & Engels: Selected Works, op. cit., p. 570.

Marx and Engels maintain that the religious revolution which goes by the name of Protestant Reformation was actually a reflection of underlying economic forces. It is to be noted here that for a Marxist the reformation has no ultimate foundation in religiosity for the simple reason that for him religion is a part of the social superstructure and is therefore primarily an effect, rather than a cause, of social action. What is progressive in religion does not, for Marx, derive from some inherent virtue in the religious mode of consciousness, but rather from the fact that the economic forces which are the ultimate causes of the religious mentality, are entering a progressive stage. There often have been in history humane religious movements directed at the reform of established religious institutions, but they do not derive necessarily from any logic inherent in the spirit of religion itself, but from more social causes. This view is stated by Engels in the following lengthy quote:

> The new World religion, Christianity, had already quietly come into being, out of a mixture of generalized Oriental, particularly Jewish, theology, and vulgarized Greek, particularly Stoic, philosophy. What it originally looked like has to be first laboriously discovered, since its official form, as it has been handed down to us, is merely that in which it became the state religion to which purpose it was adapted by the Council of Nicaea. The fact that after no more than 250 years it became the State religion suffices to show that it was the religion

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[1] Engels, "The Peasant War in Germany," On Religion, op. cit., p. 99.

> corresponding to the conditions of the time. In the Middle Ages, in the same measure as feudalism developed, Christianity grew into the religious counterpart to it, with a corresponding feudal hierarchy. And when the burghers began to thrive, there developed, in opposition to feudal Catholicism, the Protestant heresy, which first appeared in Southern France, among the Albigenses, at the time the cities there reached the highest point of their florescence. The Middle Ages had attached to theology all the other forms of ideology--philosophy, politics, jurisprudence--and made them subdivisions of theology. It thereby constrained every social and political movement to take on a theological form. The sentiments of the masses were fed with religion to the exclusion of all else; it was therefore necessary to put forward their own interests in a religious guise in order to produce an impetous movement.[1]

Marx and Engels regarded Protestantism as the perfect religious expression of capitalism. In Engels' view even the Calvinist notion of predestination was rooted in economic fact:

> Calvin's creed was one fit for the boldest of the bourgeoisie of his time. His predestination doctrine was the religious expression of the fact that in the commercial world of competition success or failure does not depend upon a man's activity or cleverness, but upon circumstances uncontrollable by him. It is not of him that willeth or of him that runneth, but of the mercy of unknown superior economic powers.[2]

Marx notes that the "forcible expropriation" of property in the sixteenth century received "a new and frightful impulse from the Reformation, and from the consequent colossal spoliation of the church property."[3] The inhabitants of the monastries were hurled into the proletariat and subtenants of the church's estates had their land confiscated as they were themselves forcefully removed. Again, Protestantism supported the genesis of capital by "changing almost all the traditional holidays into workdays."[1] In these and numerous other ways, Protestantism was merely carrying out the underlying thrust of the growing tendency of capitalism itself.

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[1] "Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy," On Religion, op. cit., p. 264.

[2] "Introduction to Socialism: Utopian and Scientific," On Religion, op. cit., pp. 300f.

[3] Capital, Vol. I, op. cit., p. 721.

When accused of trying to abolish Christianity and to establish atheism, the attitude of Marx and Engels is that such charges do not deserve serious attention at all. They remind us what happened in the history:

> When the ancient world was in the last throes, the ancient religions were overcome by Christianity. When Christian ideas succumbed in the 18th century to rationalist ideas, feudal society fought its death battle with the then revolutionary bourgeoisie.[2]

Marx and Engels believe that religion will be replaced by the proletariat in a similar way. In a review of G. Fr. Daumer's The Religion of the New Age, Marx and Engels elucidate this point further.[3] They contend that all conceptions and ideas are transformed with each great transformation of social circumstances. Different social circumstances generate different religions. In their time, people have at last discovered the secret of this historical process and were no longer willing to deify this process in the exuberant form of a new religion. They simply strip off all religions. Once man has found his way back to himself in the "material" order, he has no need to delude himself. Religion as an expression of his distress will disappear exactly as morbid delusion vanish with the body's restoration to health. Insofar as it is a protest against this distress, the sigh of the oppressed creature, it will become superfluous. The illusory happiness which the religious opiate offers will be replaced by "real happiness."

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[1] Ibid., p. 276 note.

[2] "Manifesto of the Communist Party," Marx & Engels: Selected Works, op. cit., p. 51.

[3] Cf. On Religion, op. cit., pp. 90ff.

Marx's criticism of Christianity can be summed up in the declaration that Christianity is the transcendent justification of social injustice. He condemns the Christian substitution of charity for justice. Marx emphasizes this criticism once more by referring to the "Jewish Question." In the eighteen centuries of Christian domination, he says, whatever has been granted to the Jews has been given grudgingly and by way of concession, never as a recognition of their rights as human beings.[1] The real Christian task should not be that of just helping the poor with charity; rather it is to insure for the poor the exercise of those rights whereby they can cease to be poor.

From our discussion so far, one thing is obvious: Whenever Marx attacks religion, or particularly the church, it is an indirect attack on the evils of society. Similarly, attacks on the evils of society are indirectly attacks on religion. He challenged the religion of his time to build a just social order. Thus we can say that Marx was, by his sense of injustice found in the society, on the side of the angels. Hence he has been classified with the "Children of Light" and not with the "Children of Darkness."[2]

At this point one might as well ask the question why Marx's criticism was particularly aimed at Christianity among all the religions. The answer is quite obvious. Christianity was the dominant religion in the society which Marx knew. Also, along with Hegel, he considered Christianity as the absolute religion which synthesized in itself all the religious tendencies which the history of man had manifested. This is why Leslie Dewart says that Marxist atheism is truly anti-theism, and specifically and historically anti-Christian anti-theism.[1]

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[1] Cf. "On the Jewish Question," Karl Marx: Selected Essays, trans. by H. J. Stenning (New York: Books for Libraries Press Inc., 1968), pp. 40ff.

[2] Cf. Reinhold Niebuhr, The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960), pp. 31ff.

To sum up Marx's critique of religion: Marx believed that as long as man remains under the control of alien forces, let it be the power of nature or the various forces of society, religion will persist. As long as man is incapable of eradicating the social evils which afflict him, the need for "illusory compensation" will continue to exist. What is needed is that man must redeem himself from the bondage of external forces. The only redemption open to him is that which he will render through his own labor. When he is redeemed by his own potentialities, he will realize that the ideals which are rooted in his nature need no longer be projected beyond society and history into an unearthly realm. He will recognize that it is the power within him that establishes the conditions of his own dignity and destiny. To hold that the evil of this world will be redeemed by an agency beyond man and time is to destroy the motive for secular transformation. If the secular transformation is to be achieved, man must destroy the foundation upon which religious illusion flourishes. Thus in the course of building a society "in which the free development of each is the condition for the development of all,"[2] one must fight religion because it will inevitably stand in his path. And yet, in the new transformed society there will be no need to persecute religion, for its essential function will have disappeared. There will no longer be an exploiting class, nor will the common people stand in need of religious consolation. Religion itself will disappear of its own accord without persecution. This contention is at the heart of everything that Marx wrote, and is not, as has been maintained by some, a youthful enthusiasm of Marx which he abandoned on attaining maturity. The autonomy of man--that was the goal Marx wanted to achieve through his critique of religion. Marx's criticism of religion ends

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[1] Cf. Leslie Dewart, The Future of Belief (New York: Herder & Herder, 1968), p. 61.

[2] "Manifesto of the Communist Party," Marx & Engels: Selected Works, op. cit., p. 53.

> with the teaching that *man is the highest essence for man*, hence with the *categoric imperative to overthrow all relations* in which man is a debased, enslaved, abandoned, despicable essence.[1]

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[1] Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction," *On Religion*, *op*. *cit*., p. 50.

XUM

CHAPTER IV

Transcendence According to Marx

From our discussion so far one thing is clear: the crucial point and the very essence of Marx's critique of religion is not its denial of God, but the affirmation and acknowledgment of human autonomy. The thesis of religious belief that man is God's creature is countered by the statement that man is his own maker. This is the source of the Marxist picture of history and of man, with all its political and moral consequences. This critique of religion, and the element of atheism implied in it, is therefore an integral part of Marxist conception of the world.

Marx criticizes that the idea of God, the Creator God, bars man's endless future and impoverishes man's perspectives, endeavours, and struggles. He emphasizes that human creativity cannot reach its term in God, that is, outside man. He does not accept the Christian conception of man as *ens creatum* which begins and ends with God, the source of all human actuality and potentiality. Viewed in this way, for Marx, God is the end of the possibilities which are the breath of our being. Thus we can say that Marx's critique of religion is not primarily and essentially a revolt against God, but rather a struggle on behalf of man in all of his personal needs and social relations. As it was pointed out by Olof Klohr of Jena in his lecture "*Wissenschaft und Atheismus in marxistischer Sicht*," at the Symposium on Atheism in Vienna, May 21-22, 1965, "The atheism of Marxism is, in essence, not the 'No' to religion and God, but the 'Yes' to the world, the 'Yes' to the conscious formation of human life."[1] Marx is not out to get rid of God; he is to free man--not to free him from God but from himself and from his enslavement to religion, which is his own creation. It is not God but the belief in God which must go, if man is to be free.

Thus at least theoretically Marx does not see the destruction of religion as an important aim. The disappearance of religion will be the normal outcome of a rational thinking and rational living. Man's ultimate task, as Marx sees it, is self-creation which man accomplishes by creating a world. The world which man thus creates is so rich that there is no room left in it for belief in anything but man himself and his world. It is a world in which authentic humanity is guaranteed and gradually achieved in the material, moral, cultural and intellectual spheres. Hence the thesis: the primary aim of Marx's critique of religion and his atheistic position is the realization of the positive factor of transcendence in Marxism.

Marx never uses the term *Transzendenz*, but always *Aufhebung*. Translators have rendered the term *Aufhebung* in various ways. The verb *aufheben* literally means "lift," "raise," "hold up," etc. It has also two opposed meanings. First, it can mean "abolish," "suspend," "repeal," "annul," "cancel," etc. Second, it can mean "keep," "preserve," "store away," etc. It was because of this double meaning (negative and positive) that Hegel used this term in his *Logic*,[2] where it has been translated as "transcend." Marx uses the term in a similar way. According to him, transcendence means not only abolishing the dehumanizing conditions of human life but also preserving the true essence of man and shaping his own destiny by going beyond the given. This, of course, fits with the literal meaning of the word "transcend"--"to rise above" or "to go beyond the limits."

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[1] Cited by Erwin Hinz, "Toward a New Interpretation of Religion and Atheism in the Secular Society," *Lutheran World*, Vol. 13, 1966, p. 379.

[2] Cf. Vol. I, trans. by W. H. Johnston & L. G. Struthers (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1961), pp. 119f.

Marxist philosopher Jaroslav Krejčí defines transcendence as "consisting essentially in endeavours and activities aimed at going beyond the given reality, the world as it is, overcoming it practically, conceptually and ideologically."[1] It is in this sense Marx employs the term transcendence, because transcendence perpetually opens the way for the future. However, he does not regard this opening of a new future as an incursion of the divine into human history, as in religion. Marx conceives transcendence as a dynamic human reality, as a self-transcending formation of the meaning and values of our life, as an active, real, and not merely theoretical, crossing of the frontiers of human power, freedom, culture and perspectives. By transcendence Marx means the movement of the living and humanly experienced present into the future. This transcendence which is man's openness to what is to come, unlimited openness, is in Marxism a human project in a definite historical situation, a human choice to remain open to the future as limitless human dimension, an absence of any final boundary. This choice and project form the content of the present fight for the future, including the political struggle.

The concept of transcendence has so far not been sufficiently elaborated theoretically in Marxist philosophy. The primary reason for this lack of interest is that Marx himself did not systematically develop the concept of transcendence per se, though it was fundamental to his thought and lifework. Secondly, many Marxists have often been reluctant to use the term, for the term transcendence poses certain problems. Traditionally the notion of transcendence is related to belief in a world beyond, and it has some irrational and supernatural connotations. In religion, for example, according to Marxists, transcendence denotes the illusion of an absolute and static plentitude of moral ideals, justice, freedom, love, etc.[1] But for Marxists, transcendence is the actual human experience that man, though belonging to nature, is different from the things and animals and that man, since he is able to progress always, is never complete.

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[1] Jaroslav Krejčí, "A New Model of Scientific Atheism," Concurrence, Vol. I, No. 1, 1969, p. 87.

This claim to transcendence is crucial to the understanding of Marx's critique of religion. Since Marx himself has not developed it, we shall examine this important concept by using an indirect method--by means of a study of Marx's humanism. By humanism Marx means the doctrine that affirms the value and dignity of man. It takes on a more precise meaning inasmuch as it affirms that man is an end in himself, and that he consequently rejects any form of servitude that would reduce him to a means at the hands of an owner. The decisive productive force of history is man himself at work in all the spheres of his creative activity: in production, discovery, invention, artistic creation, political and moral decisions. This is why Marx says that the driving force of history is within history itself. History is not made from outside, neither by a destiny such as Greek thought posited, nor by a providence extrinsic to human activity, nor by Hegel's "Absolute Spirit."

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[1] Cf. Roger Garaudy, "Faith and Revolution," Cross Currents, Vol. 23, No. 1, 1973, p. 35.

Marx valued more highly than anything else the initiative of human beings in history. In "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte" Marx stresses this point: "Men make their own history."[1] Man is always something other and something more than the sum of the conditions which have produced him. This is what distinguishes him from other kinds of animals.[2] Otherwise we should be relegated to an existence determined solely by instinct. Echoing the Italian philosopher Vico, Marx pointed out that man was not responsible for the evolution of nature but for his own history.[3]

Marx also believed that the advent of real man is the goal of history, which can be attained only by revolutionary action. But, what is this "real man"? First of all, he is a man related to nature. Nature is man's proper context. Nature and man interact; nature produces man but man produces nature by his labor. It is man's "species-being" (Gattungswesen) that he is a builder and moulder of his world, so that the world is as much a product of his as he is of the world. As Marx phrased it, "History itself is a real part of natural history--of nature developing into man."[4] Human history is the story of man's humanizing nature. Or, to put it another way, in man nature becomes human. If man is abstracted from his context, both he and his context are destroyed.

Secondly, man is a socially active natural being, and not just natural being as such. The history of man in nature is properly realized only in the case of social man. Here is where nature and man are united by society ("the naturalism of man and the humanism of nature both brought to fulfillment"[1]). As Marx put it, "My *own* existence *is* social activity, and therefore that which I make of myself, I make of myself for society and with the consciousness of myself as a social being."[2] Man *is* as he exists for himself as species. Species-being is in turn defined in terms of its life activity: free and conscious activity on the objective world. In work (in society) man reproduces himself and sees his reflection in the world he has made. Human essence is therefore not some abstraction which inheres in each individual.[3] It is the concrete web of relations which is actualized in human social existence.

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[1] Marx & Engels: Selected Works, op. cit., p. 97.
[2] Cf. Capital, Vol. I, op. cit., pp. 177f.
[3] Ibid., p. 372 note.
[4] Manuscripts, op. cit., p. 143.

Thirdly, human self-consciousness (in social activity) is seen as the theoretical form of that being whose living form is the community. Man's spiritual faculties and intellectual operations are simply the theoretical expression of his real being as man. Any abstraction from this reality--man as a homeless spirit, as an animal, as a kind of god, etc.--does not refer to real man at all. Marx does not deny that men are, of course, individuals. They do think individual thoughts. Men are born and they die as individuals. But the referent of the term *human* as opposed, say, to *animal*, is to man as he is "the subjective existence of thought and experienced society for itself."[4] Man is what he is concretely: in society in nature. This is his uniqueness and dignity.

This protrait of man is the basis of Marx's humanism. Any form of social structure that negates this man must itself be negated. Since man was, and is, the maker of himself, since he alone makes history, he bears full responsibility for what becomes of him and history. As

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[1] *Manuscripts*, *op*. *cit*., p. 137.
[2] *Ibid*.
[3] *Vide supra*, p. 23.
[4] *Manuscripts*, *op*. *cit*., p. 138.

XUM

Walter Hollitscher observes,

> Anyone who will have it that the world in the ordinary sense of the word is 'ruled' from above, or that man's lot is 'predestined', comes . . . into contradiction with the responsibility which morality presupposes.[1]

Here we find the basic meaning of the liberty and autonomy claimed by modern man.

But Marx contends that the liberty of man is not yet an accomplished fact. Man is deprived of liberty, enslaved and made an instrument. In other words, man is alienated. Alienation is defined with reference to the ideal, complete man, man as he ought to be, man as free. Man is alienated means, more precisely the following: a) He is not what he ought to be (privation), b) There is lacking in him something of his very self (mutilation), c) He is estranged from himself and from reality (estrangement), d) He identifies himself psychologically with an imaginary existence which becomes a substitute for reality (identification), e) He is torn by a conflict between his real essence and his ideal essence (contradiction), f) He is reduced to a means, to slavery (enslavement).[2] The process of overcoming alienation is the process through which man becomes what he ought to be, attains his ideal essence, seeks and again finds himself, repossesses that part of himself which had been seized from him, resolves the contradiction within him and reaches liberty. It is this unceasing process which Marx calls "transcendence" (*Aufhebung*).

In *The Holy Family* Marx wrote that the proletariat

> cannot free itself without abolishing [aufheben] the conditions of its own life. It cannot abolish [aufheben] the conditions of its own life without abolishing [aufheben] *all* the inhuman conditions of life

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[1] Walter Hollitscher, "The Logic of Atheism," *Concurrence*, Vol. I, No. 1, 1969, p. 78.

[2] Cf. Giulio Girardi, *Marxism & Christianity*, trans. by Kevin Traynor (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1968), p. 23.

> of society today which are summed up in its own situation.[1]

Abolishing all the inhuman conditions of life of society, and thus humanizing his relation to the material world and nature, man will transcend all forms of alienation. Religion and state are only partial expressions of the one fundamental alienation of man from nature and are bound to disappear simultaneously with their cause. But a religious or political emancipation alone can never liberate man. The religious critique merely fights the consciousness of man's alienation and leaves the roots of alienation intact. His mistake lies in the assumption that ideas are independent of the social conditions of action and, consequently, that they can be changed without changing the conditions which produced them.[2] This is what Marx means when he criticizes the atheism of his time: "Communism begins from the outset . . . with atheism, but atheism is at first far from being communism; indeed, it is still mostly an abstraction."[3] The same holds true for the political critique. Not political reforms but only a re-integration of man with nature can return him to his true essence. The key factor to the re-integration of man with nature is labor. Labor is the factor which mediates between man and nature; labor is man's effort to regulate his metabolism with nature. Labor is the expression of human life and through labor man's relationship to nature is changed, hence through labor man changes himself.

The re-integration of man with nature will also restore the bond between man and his fellow man, for the humanization of nature is essentially a social task. "Activity and mind, both in their content and in their *mode of existence*, are *social*: *social* activity and *social* mind."[1] The adjective "social" refers not just to work done in immediate cooperation with others. Even the lonely task of the scientist is social, for the material on which he works as well as his personal life are product of the community. His consciousness is "the *theoretical* shape of that which the *living* shape is the *real* community."[2] There is a mutual causality between man and society. The society which man creates through his work will in turn create him. "*Just as* society itself produces *man as man*, so is society *produced* by him."[3] "Thus *society* is the unity of being of man with nature--the true resurrection of nature."[4]

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[1] Marx & Engels, The Holy Family, op. cit., p. 52.
[2] Vide supra, pp.
[3] Manuscripts, op. cit., p. 136.

According to Marx, Communism strives for such a society, and hence he describes Communism as "the *positive* transcendence [Aufhebung] of *private property*, . . . the real *appropriation of the human* essence by and for man; . . . the complete return of man to himself as a *social* (i.e., human) being."[5] Most communist theories (e.g., Russian Communism) suppress private property by making it into common property. But such a solution still maintains the basic principle of private property: it considers material possession and not man's self-realization as the aim of labor. Marx criticized this kind of crude Communism in these words:

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 137.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 135. By "private property" Marx does not mean the private property of things for use such as furniture, automobile, etc., but the property of the "propertied class" (capitalists). Since they own the means of production, they hire the property-less individual to work for them, under conditions the latter is forced to accept. Thus the property-less individual is reduced to a means of production. Hence "private property" is considered here as an expression of human self-alienation.

> In negating the *personality* of man in every sphere, this type of communism is really nothing but the logical expression of private property, which is its negation. General *envy* constituting itself as a power is the disguise in which *greed* reestablishes itself and satisfies itself, only in *another* way. The thought of every piece of private property--inherent in each piece as such--is *at least* turned against all *wealthier* private property in the form of envy and the urge to reduce things to a common level, so that this envy and urge even constitute the essense of competition. The crude communism is only the culmination of this envy and of this leveling down proceeding from the *preconceived* minimum. It has a *definite, limited* standard. How little this annulment of private property is really an appropriation is in fact proved by the abstract negation of the entire world of culture and civilization, the regression to the *unnatural* simplicity of the *poor* and *undemanding* man who has not only failed to go beyond private property, but has not yet even reached it.[1]

Private property should be suppressed not by making it common property, but by abolishing the alienation itself of which it is the expression. Through this positive transcendence of private property, the object of man's activity again becomes a human object. Man appropriates the world in a human way: his relation to it is no longer a means to an end outside himself but an expression of his entire being, in which be objectifies himself without losing himself. Nature becomes human and man becomes natural.

> The transcendence [Aufhebung] of private property is therefore the complete *emancipation* of all human senses and qualities, but it is this emancipation precisely because these senses and attributes have become, subjectively and objectively, *human*. The eye has become a *human* eye, just as its *object* has become a social, *human* object--an object made by man for man. The *senses* have therefore become directly in their practice *theoreticians*. They relate themselves to the *thing* for the sake of the thing, but the thing itself is an *objective human* relation to itself and to man, and vice

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[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 133f.

> versa. Need or enjoyment have consequently lost their *egotistical* nature, and nature has lost its mere *utility* by use becoming *human* use.[1]

Man's objectification of himself in nature creates a genuine culture when he uses nature in a truly human way. When man's relationship with nature is truly humanized by the transcendence of private property, Marx believed, all expressions of estranged human life will disappear:

> The positive transcendence [Aufhebung] of *private property*, as the appropriation of *human* life, is therefore the positive transcendence of all estrangement--that is to say, the return of man from religion, family, state, etc., to his *human*, i.e., *social* existence. Religious estrangement as such occurs only in the realm of *consciousness*, of man's inner life, but economic estrangement is that of real life; its transcendence therefore embraces both aspects.[2]

In religion, the content of transcendence is God, the transcendent future is the power of God which comes to humanity and evokes a response. But Marx denies any sort of superhuman transcendence. He is reluctant to identify transcendence with God because he understands the absoluteness of God to function as a limit, a restraint upon the otherwise unlimited field of human possibilities. Dependence on a transcendent God and full human autonomy are incompatible:

> A *being* only considers himself independent when he stands on his own feet; and he only stands on his own feet when he owes his *existence* to himself. A man who lives by the grace of another regards himself as a dependent being. But I live completely by the grace of another if I owe him not only the maintenance of my life, but if he has, moreover, *created* my *life*--if he is the *source* of my life. When it is not of my own creation, my life has necessarily a source of this kind outside of it.[3]

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[1] *Ibid*., p. 139.
[2] *Ibid*., p. 136.
[3] *Ibid*., p. 144.

Echoing Aristotle, Marx says:

> You have been begotten by your father and your mother; therefore in you the mating of two human beings--a species-act of human being--has produced the human being. You see, therefore, that even physically, man owes his existence to man.[1]

Thus the question of creation cannot even arise for Marx, because it conflicts with praxis.

We shall elucidate Marx's concept of transcendence with reference to one of the leading Marxist thinkers of our time. Roger Garaudy, who is well known for his sympathetic attitude toward religion, has pointed out that religion may have some practical justification:

> Like every ideology, religion is a project, it is a way of breaking away from, transcending the given, of anticipating the real, whether by justifying the existing order or by protesting against it and attempting to transform it.[2]

But this does not change his position on religion as a whole, for this transcendence must always remain within the immanence of human possibilities. According to him, "transcendence is no longer an attribute of God but a dimension of man, a dimension of our experience and our acts."[3] It is a totally human phenomenon, a "dialectical supersession" of man by himself.[4] He further explains Marxist concept of transcendence in these words:

> To liberate man from all alienation, material and moral, is to accomplish, within the continuing creation of man by man, a new decisive step towards increased hominisation, a step as important as the invention of the tool, through which the human branch broke away from the common trunk of animality by conquering

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Roger Garaudy, From Anathema to Dialogue, trans. by Luke O'Neill (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), p. 76.

[3] Ibid., p. 46.

[4] Cf. Roger Garaudy, Marxism in the Twentieth Century, trans. by René Hague (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), p. 209.

> consciousness. This new frontier of hominisation, making of every man a man, questioning and creative, will mark a new detachment from the earth. The detachment, this time, will be from all the alienations which have been crystallized for thousands of years and have become so thoroughly customary as to seem to us like a given nature, like earth itself. It will free the spiritual energies of each man and of all men with such force that it is absolutely impossible--for us who are caught in the alienations of our pre-history--to imagine their nature and their use. This future, open on the infinite, is the only transcendence which is known to us as atheists.[1]

Thus the difference between religious (to be more precise, Christian) and Marxist concepts of transcendence is this:

> For a Christian, transcendence is the act of God who comes towards him and summons him. For a Marxist, it is a dimension of man's activity which goes out beyond itself towards its far-off being.[2]

Garaudy asserts that any attempt to refer transcendence to an absolute, to God, would be to limit man by imposing an antiquated worldview on him. To the Marxist, transcendence is actually a demand, an exigency, a driving force, but a force that cannot be conceived, named, or expected. Nor can it be hypostatized. As Garaudy put it:

> To investigate the dimension of transcendence, conceived not as an attribute to God but as a dimension of man, is not to start from something which exists in our world in a vain attempt to prove the existence of what can exist only in another world; it is simply to investigate all the dimensions of human reality.[3]

Man is an incomplete being, a creature in the process of formation. The goal of this self-creation is an ever fuller social consciousness, a more complete social integration, and an absolute domination of the physical world. In other words, the exigency of which Garaudy speaks is future oriented--it is the demand for an ever more complete realization of the potential of man.

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[1] Garaudy, From Anathema to Dialogue, op. cit., pp. 93f.
[2] Ibid., p. 92.
[3] Garaudy, Marxism in the Twentieth Century, op. cit., p. 104.

Here, then, is the sum and substance of Marx's concept of transcendence: The moment nature gave birth to man by a "spontaneous generation," it became essentially related to him, to be humanized by his free activity. Nature and man are no longer two powers in opposition to one another, but two terms of one relation. Through a vital interplay with nature man makes himself. Unlike other animals which are passively determined by their material environment he actively transforms nature and adopts it to his own needs. Thus man rises over all other animal species and begins an historical evolution. Here we have a qualitative leap, a real outgrowing, a "transcendence" in the strictly etymological sense of the term. The future to which he is moving is completely open to man. He shapes the universe and his own destiny, and thus he is not any more the object of history but its subject and agent. It is this possibility, which enables man to move towards the future along an original road that the animal was incapable of knowing--the road that entails freedom and choice--what Marx calls Aufhebung, which we might translate "transcendence."

CHAPTER V

Marx's Critique of Religion as Challenge to Christianity

Any serious thinker with concern for humanity will admit that Marxist humanism influences one-third of the world's population. No one can condemn outright an ideology which sustains so many men and so many nations and which constitutes the hope of so many of the oppressed and the exploited. It is essential, therefore, that we Christians meet the challenge of Marxism in a positive way.

Perhaps there is no other aspect of Marxist ideology which has drawn the attention of Christians as much as atheism. Christians are disturbed and feel threatened when they meet atheists. But let us not forget that when we confront ourselves with atheism, we are actually inquiring about the overall destiny of our generation as a whole. For this reason it must be clear from the very beginning that this confrontation of atheism in no way expresses only a specific Christian concern. The entire spiritual state of man today enters into the purview of our study. Whether the Christian troubles himself about it or not, the theme of atheism concerns all equally. As long as the Christian seeks to present a strong and vital testimony of his faith, he must know that the world of which he is a part is influenced by an atheistic climate of which he must unsentimentally take notice.

It is highly important that Christians must guard themselves against merely defaming atheism with a blunt, propagandistic air. Many see in atheism only an error, the most dangerous error in history; they find its roots in moral deviation, and their prime concern is to proclaim its condemnation. This is indeed not an encouraging encounter with atheism.

If we are to understand atheism in its right perspective we have to quit the approach of condemnation. Giulio Girardi brings out this point succinctly:

> Since man is fundamentally orientated towards truth and authentic values, it is to be expected that, for the atheist himself, the meaning of atheism consists more in the truths which it involves than in the errors in which it finds expression; more in the real values which it affirms than in those it denies. To understand atheism means, therefore, to ask what are the truths which the atheist intends to affirm and the values to which he intends to adhere when he denies God.[1]

This does not mean, however, that atheism can be reduced to the rejection of a deformed image of God and of religion, as done by some Christians. They reach a paradoxical conclusion that the atheistic denial is directed at a falsely conceived God, and therefore atheism is not in fact error, but truth. This approach is as distorted as that of condemnation. What is needed on the part of the believer is an acute and balanced power of discrimination, equidistant from either a condemnation or an acceptance. Atheism may not be reduced either to its errors or to its truths. It results from both.

Those not well acquainted with Marx often believe that the founder of Marxism was a militant atheist who considered the extermination of religion and, in particular, of Christianity one of his major tasks. This is not true. Marx, of course, was an atheist. It is to be noted here, however, that his atheism is quite different from the classical atheism of eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which are "political" and "scientist" in nature.[2] Marx's atheism was neither a purely methodological one, nor merely a skeptical one. Nor does it seem correct to say that his atheism was an historical accident rather than an essential feature of the Marxian *Weltanshauung*. Marx's atheism is distinctly dogmatic, in the sense that Marx always denied decidedly and uncompromisingly the existence of a divine being, and this denial is one of the major cornerstones of Marx's outlook. Marx, however, was far from ascribing to the anti-religious fight the importance which it has, for example, in the eyes of contemporary Communists. He looked on religion as a consequence of a more basic evil, the evil of a society in which man "has either not yet found himself or has already lost himself again."[1] As Marx saw it, religion in general and Christianity in particular were *in extremis*, if not already dead.

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[1] Giulio Girardi, Marxism & Christianity, op. cit., pp. 2f.

[2] For a discussion of classical atheism and its difference from Marxist atheism, see, Henri de Lubac, The Drama of Atheist Humanism, trans. by Edith M. Riley (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1950). Also see, Roger Garaudy, Marxism in the Twentieth Century, op. cit., pp. 106ff.

Marx's atheism is essentially humanistic. It starts not from a negation, but from an affirmation. It affirms the autonomy of man and it involves as a consequence the rejection of every attempt to rob man of his creative power. It concentrates our feelings, our thoughts and our actions around humanity. This aspect of humanism found in Marx's atheism can be elucidated in these words of Erich Fromm:

> The problem today is not so much whether God is dead, the problem is whether man is dead. Man, not physically at this moment--although that is threatened too--but spiritually. Whether man has not become and is becoming more an automation, which will eventually leave him completely empty and without vitality. The new humanism in its various forms is united in its determination that man should not die.[2]

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[1] "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction," *On Religion*, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

[2] Erich Fromm, "A Global Philosophy of Man," *Humanist*, Vol. 26, July/August, 1966, p. 122.

The vacuum created by the elimination of God in classical atheism has now been filled by humanity. Humanity has been substituted for God.

Marx's atheism is not pessimistic in nature. It tends on the contrary to be optimistic. This is because it is motivated largely by man's self-assertion. The modern secular man is an autonomous man. He believes that there is no higher Being than man himself, so man must create his own values, set his own standards and goals, and work out his own salvation. There is nothing transcending man's own powers and intelligence, so he cannot look for any support from beyond himself. He suspects that faith in God would be a weakening of his own sense of responsibility and finds that God begins to appear as his rival. Too long have men been subject to God or to gods, and only as they have learned to take matters into their own hands have they made any advance. So we are told that man cannot really be free to order their world and to build a better future unless God is deposed and men assume complete responsibility. Man has gotten rid of God in order to regain possession of the human greatness which, as it seems to him, is being unwarrentably withheld by another. By discarding God he has overthrown an obstacle in order to gain his freedom. Proudhon, the Robinson Crusoe of Socialism, calls this position "anti-theism."[1] It is this anti-theism that we find in Marxism. We can summarize Marx's atheism, which is anti-theism in content, in these words of Milan Machovec:

> What is the deepest meaning of atheistic Marxism? Certainly not the mere negation of the idea of 'God', for no mere negation can fill men with deep and enduring

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[1] Cf. Henri de Lubac, The Drama of Atheist Humanism, op. cit., pp. 6f. Also see, E. H. Carr, Studies in Revolution (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964), pp. 38ff.

> enthusiasm. Nor the mere abolition of hunger, need, exploitation. Those were and unfortunately still are the primary concrete tasks in some countries. But they will be solved one day, and what then? The ultimate meaning of Marxism is not politics or the cult of power, for that too has to be abolished. Nor did Marx want to turn all men into economists, quite the opposite. By the predominantly economic character of his greatest works Marx aimed at freeing men from economic cares. The enduring positive ideal and meaning of Marxist teaching is the fully authentic human life, the free human personality, or rather the 'message' that we must seek real ways of attaining the humanist ideals by scientific analysis and patiently overcome any, not just the capitalistic, forms of human self-alienation.[1]

If we were to judge Marx's atheism solely on the basis of Marxist propaganda, the picture would be just as poor as would be a judgment on religious consciousness based on attendance figures at religious services. Marx's atheism is striving for a revolutionary worldview, which is not dependent on its formal rejection of religion. Marx is trying to restore to people a purpose in life and to give the whole struggle of mankind a higher meaning. We cannot completely ignore this effort, to the extent that it is directed at the progress of humanity. This reminds us that the church must be ready to witness to the lordship of Christ by cooperating with men of good will of all religious and non-religious groups who are genuinely concerned to seek better ways of living and working.

From the church's point of view, atheism has always been regarded as a negative phenomenon. Anyone who did not believe in a particular religious faith was called an atheist. This was the general view in the medieval and modern ages of intolerance when freedom of opinion did not exist. At the time of Enlightenment Thomas Paine defended himself against this kind of logic: "If I do not believe as you believe, that only proves that you do not believe as I believe, that is all."[1] Atheism does not primarily mean to believe in nothing at all, but to believe in a way which is not that of religion. Modern Marxists can say the same thing in defence of their own form of belief. To recognize that fact in a sober and critical way and to discuss the matters at issue belong also to the church's encounter with atheists. But it is a pity that the appropriate critical relation toward atheism has been uncritically expanded into a kind of negativism. It has been the practice of the church to summarize atheism as something inhuman, absolutely perverted and even almost demonic. So for centuries the atheist has been regarded as someone basically irresponsible and untrustworthy, even immoral. Atheism itself has consequently been viewed in a juridical way as a sacrilege, a transgression, something which should be resisted with utmost retaliation. As a Christian community we have to recognize and acknowledge the relativity of atheism. Jan Lochman in his thought provoking book *Church in a Marxist Society* explains this idea in its historical, psychological, and theological aspects.[2]

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[1] Milan Machovec, "Atheism and Christianity--Their Function of Mutual Challenge," Concurrence, Vol. I, No. 3, 1969, p. 188.

The Greeks designated as atheists not only those declared deniers of God and the materialists but also those who in the name of another faith separated themselves from the established religion. Socrates is an example to this. Many a Christian martyr encountered the battle cry, "Down with the atheists." Even in Christianity itself we find the tendency to call those who differ from orthodox faith as atheists. "It is worthwhile," as Lochman suggests, "to remember this lesson of our historical orientation and resist that inquisition and crusade spirit precisely when we meet those who think differently from us, especially in our encounters with atheists."[1]

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[1] Cited by Jaroslav Krejčí, "A New Model of Scientific Atheism," *Concurrence*, Vol. I, No. 1, 1969, p. 96.

[2] Cf. Jan Lochman, *Church in a Marxist Society* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), pp. 158ff.

Atheism is a dialectical phase of life. "I believe; help my unbelief!"[2] This situation is significant. Doubt is an integral part of living faith. As Roger Garaudy stated: "The depth of faith in a believer depends upon the force of the atheist he bears in himself and defends against all idolatory."[3] If we rightly understand this psychological relativity, we will not be so easily tempted to consider the atheistic possibility as something totally alien to us, as a curse which only drives and threatens other men. In one of his novels, The Possessed, Dostoyevsky makes Bishop Tihon say to Stavrogin: "The complete atheist stands on the penultimate step to most perfect faith (he may or may not take a further step)."[4] This has been one of the most profound statements that has ever been made on the subject of atheism. All men, the pious and the worldly, here find themselves together in the same situation.

The theological relativity of atheism directs us to the foundations of the life of faith. The beginning and ground of human existence does not lie within us, but lies instead in the reality which is the basis for faith--in the reality, action, and history of God. The essence of Christianity is founded not by faith but by the work of God--more exactly, in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Thus this essence of faith cannot in any way be destroyed by unfaith. Both faith and unfaith are not the matter itself, but instead they are response to it. The Gospel remains sovereign over faith and unfaith. Therefore the task of the church is not to denounce the atheists but to declare the Gospel to them.

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[1] Ibid., p. 159.

[2] Mark 9:24.

[3] Roger Garaudy, "Christian-Marxist Dialogue," Journal of Ecumenical Studies, Vol. 4, 1967, p. 222. For a discussion of the interrelatedness of belief and unbelief, and its psychological implications, see, Paul W. Pruyser, Between Belief and Unbelief (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).

[4] Fyodor Dostoyevsky, The Possessed (New York: The Modern Library, 1963), p. 698.

The spiritual situation of the world, especially in those societies hitherto nominally Christian, shows that not just the Marxist, but all modern men are conditioned by an atheistic atmosphere, and that evolution of science and technology is a permanent assault on the traditional structure of the church and everything we call religion. From the perspective of theology as we understand it, all human divisions, systems, social and political institutions, all philosophical thoughts, find themselves on the same level, on the side of the created world in its corruption and promise. As Czech theologian Josef Hromadka, the pioneer of Marxist-Christian dialogue, puts it:

> The dividing line runs not between communists and noncommunists. It runs between the Lord of glory and mercy, on the one hand, and human sinners (whether communists or noncommunists) on the other. Theologically, it is all wrong to see the main line of division between the Christian ideology and civilization, on the one hand, and the non-Christian Weltanschauung on the other.[1]

This is something which we must always remember. As Hromadka pointed out in a different context:

> What matters is whether a Christian in the purity of his faith and his understanding of man joins the struggle and demonstrates by the audacity of his faith, by his love for his neighbour, and his optimism about the future, that he is not just the passive object of history or even of the new society, but rather the co-author and co-architect of the new order.[2]

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[1] Josef L. Hromadka, Theology Between Yesterday and Tomorrow (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, MCMLVII), p. 67.

[2] Josef L. Hromadka, Impact of History on Theology, trans. by Monika and Benjamin Page (Notre Dame: Fides Publishers, 1970), p. 83.

At the same time it is our responsibility to examine ourselves, to allow Marxism and modern science and technology in general to challenge our idols and fetishes, our superstition and backwardness, and our lazy attitude toward the real events taking place in our society.

Earlier we found that Marx's critique of religion is derived from a detailed analysis of the manifestation of nineteenth century religion, and his negation of religion has a predominantly social character. By calling religion an ideology, Marx implies that it provides a transcendent escape for the victims of the class struggle and thus deadens their revolutionary passion for changing their existing order. This is a challenge Christianity must meet. If we examine Marx's critique carefully, we will recognize that its most important argument is the fact that Christianity, during its almost two thousand years of existence, has failed to do away with poverty, servitude, wars and social disorder. Christians have betrayed their mission in the world. They have allowed their faith to be used to support the powerful against the weak, to become a weapon against the small, contributing to their bondage. There is, indeed, much truth in the provocative statement of Martin Luther King, Jr.: "How often the church has been an echo rather than a voice, a taillight behind . . . secular agencies, rather than a headlight guiding men progressively and decisively to higher levels of understanding."[1] We cannot erase easily these facts from the history of Christianity. In the face of these facts, there can be little doubt that Christianity itself has been one of the major causes of atheism in the modern world. We can learn from these past mistakes, and in a spirit of deep humility and penitence before our God acknowledge the guilt of past generations which clings to us who strive today to bear the joyous message of Christ. Christianity must ever be on guard lest it give grounds for the suspicion that it is cultivating an ideology which can be exploited by the ruling classes.

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[1] Martin Luther King, Jr., *Strength to Love* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 98.

Any theory, any idea and philosophy, can be understood in its essence only if we understand the concrete situation in which it originated and if we relate it to our concrete circumstance of life. But the truth of the matter is, very often we Christians forget that an abstract interpretation of prophetic and apostolic message deprives the divine word of its real meaning and relevance. We also forget that the Word of God can be adequately understood and interpreted only in its vital relation to our present human situation. Marx's critique of religion reminds us that theory must correspond to life needs.[1] This means that religion must arise from the actual life expereinces of modern man and not be dogmatically imposed upon him. Theory and practice must be unified, which involves seeing Christian concepts in their development out of historical experience, and discovering the deeper meaning of the Gospel message by using it to change society. It is with this historical and social consciousness Paul Tillich gave the clarion call to Christians to engage in social action:

> The Kingdom of God is not a static heaven into which individuals enter after death; it is the dynamic divine power in and above history which drives history toward ultimate fulfillment. It refers to groups as well as to individuals, and demands continuous efforts toward justice, which is basic in it.[2]

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[1] Cf. "Theses on Feuerbach," especially theses I, IV and XI, On Religion, op. cit., pp. 69ff.

[2] Paul Tillich, "How Much Truth Is There in Karl Marx?" Christian Century, Vol. 65, No. 36, 1948, p. 907.

To be a Christian is not just "to serve God," but it is also a dynamic social ethic, a service to mankind. We may not agree with Feuerbach when he says that theology is anthropology; but we have to admit that there is certainly much anthropology in theology. Although Christianity is directed to the "beyond," it nevertheless must influence our actions in the realm of the "here below." It must give a deeper meaning to our bond with the world and with history. Solidarity with the agonies and problems of modern man become the sacrament of God's serving presence in the midst of the world.[1] Christians cannot escape into a false mysticism or an illusory transcendentalism, where the affairs and needs of their brothers are left "here below." It is true that Christians do look beyond the terrible realities of the "here below," but this is not to evade them or to rend them illusory. Rather, by loving and serving men, they prepare for the Lord's parousia in the very act of love for their brothers. As Christians, we are always human beings, and human dignity and endeavors must always be of supreme importance. In this sense there can be no radical division between believer and atheist. Marx's critique of religion challenges Christians for a vision of man rooted more deeply in reality. It exhorts Christians to act out the implications of man made in the image of God who has become incarnate. It reminds the church of the real concern of the Gospel. The true renunciation of ecclesiastical privileges, a giving up of the gifts of the church to the world, therefore, correspond to the central movement of the Gospel, the path of god to man, i.e., the saving renunciation of the Son of God on behalf of the world.[2]

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[1] Cf. Matthew 25:36-40.
[2] Cf. Philippians 2.

Marx's critique of religion is in many ways similar to those of the prophets of the Old Testament.[1] Like the biblical prophets Marx fought against the established religion.[2] Marx's critique of religious and other forms of alienation is not primarily impelled by metaphysical or even **scientific** purposes. It is humanistic and prophetic--in the sense of exposing the depths of good and evil in those issues with which men struggle, suffer, despair, hope, live and die. Prophets have ever been the adversaries of evil gods. They fought against all gods who were not congruous with man's highest good. Marx's favorite maxim, "Nihil humani a me alienum puto"[3] (I believe that nothing human is alien to me) is illustrative of his concern for humanity.

Theology as self examination on the part of the church will have to distinguish what is valid in Marx's critique of religion from what is out of place and false. The valid element in Marx's critique includes both the observation of the universal sociological conditioning of religious life, and the charge that frequently religion serves the interests of the ruling classes. It also draws our attention to the fact that most Christian movements of renewal limit the thrust of their attack and challenge to the sphere of the private person, remain socially conservative, attacking the heathenism of individuals, but not of institutions. Christians believe that God loves each human being with a unique personal love. Accordingly, Christians will also need to assert the primacy of personal worth in new communitarian modes.

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[1] Cf. Paul Tillich, "Marx and the Prophetic Tradition," Radical Religion, Vol. I, No. 1, 1935, pp. 21ff. Also see, Howard L. Parsons, "The Prophetic Mission of Karl Marx," Marxism and Christianity, ed. by Herbert Aptheker (New York: Humanities Press, 1968), pp. 143ff.

[2] In this connection one would remember that there are more penetrating criticisms on religion in the Bible itself than Marx and Engels have ever said. Cf. Amos 5:21, 24.

[3] Reminiscences of Marx and Engels, op. cit., p. 266.

Thus, the question arises, will they incarnate more historically than before their own belief in the "mystical body" of Christ, and the collective destiny of the fully redeemed or "liberated" human race. Let us not forget that the biblical injunction to be watchful is not first of all to be directed to external opponents and temptations, but to those inner dangers and possibilities of degeneration within us. In this connection one would recall how Paul Tillich stressed the importance of this kind of self-examination. Emphasizing the importance of the study of the theoretical foundations of Communism, Tillich said:

> Since the churches aspire to speak in the name of God, they have to direct every criticism, first of all, against themselves, admitting in this way that they are met by the same judgment as those criticized by them.[1]

Marx's critique of religion should be considered as a symbol of our lack of prophetic spirit. We have to recognize that the divine judgment over the world was not pronounced by ourselves strongly enough and, consequently, was given into the hands of a secular movement, inimical to the churches. We have to acknowledge this as a divine judgment over ourselves.

What shall, then, be the approach of Christians to Marxist atheists? Helmut Gollwitzer puts it this way:

> The non-religious man of the present does not require first to be led to religion, transformed into a religious man, in order then to take a second step along this way to come to the Christian faith. Without his putting himself in a religious frame of mind, creating for himself religious experiences, awakening within himself a so-called natural consciousness of God, thus without his being compelled to adopt forms of consciousness which he can no longer recapture, he must be encountered in his life, which has become secular, by the good news from the Lord of the world, who has committed himself in the man Jesus of Nazareth to the world and the secularity

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[1] Paul Tillich, "The Church and Communism," Religion in Life, Vol. VI, No. 3, 1937, p. 351.

> of the stable and the gallows ("without the camp" of religion, Hebrews 13:13!)[1]

It is with the powers of this world, positive and negative, that we have to deal with in religion. For this reason we cannot use the gospel and our theology as defensive weapons in the fight between the religious and the non-religious; rather they are to be used, without prejudice, to discuss with the non-religious the phenomenon and problems of religion and the everlasting love of God. In this way Christian theology becomes both the defender of religion over against the onesidedness and superficiality of Marx's critique of religion, and at the same time the ally of this critique against the "alienation" of man. Since Marx directs his attacks on religion in the name of man, against the alienation of man from his own potentialities and purposes, it constitutes, for that reason, the greatest challenge to Christianity in our time. It has been pointed out that this challenge could help to purify our descriptions, both of God and of Christianity, of all that is human in them. Rather than have recourse to an unproductive apologetics when faced with contemporary atheism, we ought to concern ourselves with weeding out from Christianity what is not authentic, and we should even be grateful to Marx's critique of religion for the purifying function which it performs in this way.

The Marxists believe that the church rejects Marxism not primarily because it is atheistic, but because it is revolutionary and because violence has a place in this revolution. It is to be noted here that Marx did not idealize violence as such. His error may be called rather an error of judgment. Believing that the bourgeoisie would not yield their class position without armed resistence, he naturally believed also that overthrow by violence would be necessary. His followers took this point more seriously than the master himself, and they found that religion and class society were slower in dying than expected. That is why Communism, a totalitarian form of Marxism, became militant in our time. Of course, Christians will deplore the use of violence, but still they must make up their mind where they will stand should violent revolution or counter-revolution break out, just as they have always had to decide what their position on war should be. It is not then on the use of violence *per se* that Christians and Marxists part company, but rather on the advocacy of violence and the preaching of its necessity.

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[1] Helmut Gollwitzer, The Christian Faith and the Marxist Criticism of Religion, op. cit., pp. 155f.

The basic trend of their biblical heritage has always pushed Christians to social action. Compared with other religions and spiritual movements, the biblical faith has displayed an incomparable historical and social initiative. It is up to us, now, in the light of Marx's critique of religion, to examine whether the church has taken this element seriously. Johannes Baptist Metz underlines this notion in these words:

> Only in the consciousness of their public responsibility can faith and Church take seriously their task of criticizing society. Only thus can the Church avoid becoming merely an ideological superstructure built above a certain existing social order. Only thus can she avoid becoming the final religion of our fully secularized society to which credit is given for certain functions of relief for the individual, but no power to criticize society.[1]

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[1] Johannes Baptist Metz, "The Controversy About the Future of Man--An Answer to Roger Garaudy," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, Vol. 4, 1967, p. 234.

Thus it is our responsibility to prove that to be a Christian does not mean to be the defender of the established order. The church, certainly, can play a vital role for the transformation of society.

In a Kierkegaardian sense, Marx's critique of religion reveals an "existential pathos." According to Kierkegaard, "existential pathos is present whenever the Idea is brought into relation with the existence of the individual so as to transform it."[1] By means of his critique of religion Marx is directing our attention to the "real distress" of man--the "oppressed creature" living in a "heartless world".[2] Insofar as Marx is seeking to bring the idea of "real distress" (as understood by religion) into relation with the human condition of distress (as understood by man) so as to transform the human condition, his critique of religion reveals an "existential pathos," and it is religiously edifying. Marx's concern for the "self-consciousness of man" lies very close to the religious task of being relevant in the world. Seen in this light Marx's critique of religion may very well be a "religious criticism" of the world.[3] As P. M. John suggests,

> The overall impact of Marx's 'criticism of the world'--the task of unmasking 'human self-alienation in its unholy forms' does not appear to be an unwarrented and naive criticism of heaven, religion and theology. If the passion and quality of Marx's criticism of the world of politics and political economy are any guide, and if the image of 'human self-consciousness' which Marx presents even remotely resembles, for example, the Christian understanding of the Imago dei in man, then, it may not be quite out of place to suggest that 'Criticism of religion' was a primary tool in the hands of Marx for an eminently 'religious criticism' of the world.[4]

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[1] Søren Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postcript, trans. by David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton: University Press, 1971), p. 347.

[2] Cf. Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction," On Religion, op. cit., p. 42.

[3] Cf. P. M. John, "Religious Criticism," Religion and Society, Vol. XVII, No. 2, 1970, pp. 54ff.

[4] Ibid., p. 67.

XUM

Marx's critique of religion cannot be accepted or refuted merely on the basis of religious dogmas, for the dogmas themselves are to be evaluated on the basis of the "truth of man" and not outside of it. Therefore, insofar as Marx's critique of religion pertains to the "truth of man" it remains in the realm of "religious criticism" since religion proclaims the truth of man and of the world. Marx cannot be ignored as a religious critic simply because he might offend the sentiments of conventional religiosity. He can be ignored only if and when his critique of religion ignores the "truth of man."

We are living in a world come of age. Today nothing can be achieved any longer by means of the traditional location of the concept of God in the gaps of natural science, by means of the assertion that the concept of God is necessary to explain the world, by means of any transformation of the world by theistic proofs. Charles West had this in mind when he remarked:

> That realm of nature which used to be beyond human understanding and control, with which, therefore, one could only establish a creative relation by means of this hypothesis 'God', is now more and more being conquered by reason and technique.[1]

Whatever we are to make of Marx's critique of religion, Christian theology must see in the Marxist identification of Christianity and idealism a warning for the church. It has given us a fruitful impulse for a thorough going self-criticism.

Despite our agreement with his proposed solutions, Marx's concern falls along the same line as some of the contemporary schools of thought in theology. Perhaps the single most significant result of the new

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[1] Charles West, *Communism and the Theologians* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1958), p. 338.

XUM

school of Liberation Theology[1] is that it represents the final Christian coming-to-terms with Marx, the positive appropriation of Marx's contribution to modern thought and life.

Today, as ever before, man is seeking to live an authentic human life. In the preceding chapters we found that Marx, through his Promethean role, was trying to achieve this "authentic human life" which man seeks. We also found that Marx's critique of religion was in fact an affirmation of human autonomy. It is hoped that the socialist society, as visualized by Marx, gives men more social justice and security, more human dignity, more free time, better standards of living, etc. So far so good. But this same society will have to answer an essential question: What is the authentic human life? What is the ultimate meaning of human existence? Here Dietrich Bonhoeffer comes to our aid. Bonhoeffer also proclaimed the autonomy of man in a world come of age. But, according to him, it was the crucified and risen Christ who made the autonomy of man and the coming of age possible. Bonhoeffer found that the recognition of world's autonomy is nothing but the knowledge of God which seeks to follow God where He has already preceded us. He also criticized religion, but did not want to abolish religion. He maintained that if the church is to be relevant to our time it must be ready to criticize itself and re-examine its traditional beliefs and practices. He reminds us that the tremendous task and responsibility placed on Christians is to make the secular world recognize the full reality of human life and to show how the Gospel proclaims and realizes it. We must make clear by our life and theological approach that as Christians we do not live in the air but on earth and that we wish to serve men because of Jesus of Nazareth who humbled himself and made himself of no account. This is the contribution that we can make to the emerging Marxist-Christian dialogue. We shall now examine to what extent Bonhoeffer's theology will help in making a corrective of Marx's critique of religion.

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[1] Some of the key figures in this school of thought, who have taken Marx's critique of religion seriously, are: Jürgen Moltmann, Theology of Hope, trans. by James W. Leitch (New York: Harper & Row, 1967); Johannes Baptist Metz, Theology of the World, trans. by William Glen-Doepel (New York: The Seabury Press, 1973); Gustavo Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation, trans. by Sr. Caridad Inda and John Egleson (New York: Orbis Book, 1973); and Rubem A. Alves, A Theology of Human Hope (Indiana: Abbey Press, 1972).

PART II

DIETRICH BONHOEFFER'S CRITIQUE OF RELIGION

CHAPTER VI

Bonhoeffer's Concept of "World Come of Age"

Dietrich Bonhoeffer is such a fascinating theologian that he is being read and interpreted both in East and West, among Catholics and Protestants, liberals and conservatives, clergymen and laymen, students of systematic theology and social action alike. The current interest in Bonhoeffer's writings, especially in his *Letters and Papers from Prison*, is reminiscent of what Engels said of Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity*:

> Then came Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity*. . . . One must oneself have experienced the liberating effect of this book to get an idea of it. Enthusiasm was general; we all became at once Feuerbachians.[1]

Indeed, the influence of *Letters and Papers from Prison* was so extraordinary that soon after its publication many became Bonhoefferians. As Henry Mottu has pointed out,

> . . . everything suggests that Bonhoeffer was, and still is, the Feuerbach of what is called (not without exaggeration and a certain naiveté) "the new theology"; that he is the "river of fire" through which we have passed with fear and delight, the "purgatory" of our theological existence today.[2]

This does not mean, however, that Bonhoeffer is free of criticism. Among his readers, along with great admirers, there are bitter critics also. This is because, more than any other theologian of our time, he

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[1] Engels, "Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy," *On Religion*, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

[2] Henry Mottu, "Feuerbach and Bonhoeffer: Criticism of Religion and the Last Period of Bonhoeffer's Thought," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, Vol. XXV, No. 1, 1969, pp. 1f. Mottu's statement echos the advice Marx gave to the speculative theologians and philosophers of his time. *Vide supra*, pp. 43f.

XUM

seems to have adopted modes of expression and types of questions which penetrate into the very heart of his readers. There is no doubt that, more than any other works of Bonhoeffer, his Letters and Papers from Prison has been the subject of severe criticism. This book was criticized even by those who praised his earlier works. Commenting on The Communion of Saints (Sanctorum Communio), Bonhoeffer's doctoral dissertation, Karl Barth said:

> I openly confess that I have misgivings whether I can even maintain the high level reached by Bonhoeffer, saying no less in my own words and context, and saying it no less forcefully, than did this young man so many years ago.[1]

Reading The Cost of Discipleship the same theological giant of the modern era said:

> . . . the matter [of Christian discipleship] is handled with such depth and precision that I am almost tempted simply to reproduce them [the opening sections] in an extended quotation. For I cannot hope to say anything better on the subject than what is said here by a man who, having written on discipleship, was ready to achieve it in his own life, and did in his own way achieve it even to the point of death.[2]

But when he read Letters and Papers from Prison the tone was changed. In a reply to P. W. Herrenbrück's question about what he thought of Bonhoeffer's ideas altogether and, in particular, of Bonhoeffer's attacks on him, Barth said:

> I am somewhat embarrassed by the thought that so sensible and well-meaning a man as Bonhoeffer somehow remembered my books (which he certainly did not have with him in his prison cell) in terms of this enigmatic expression ['positivism of revelation'] . The hope remains that in heaven at least he has not reported

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[1] Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, Vol. IV, Part 2 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1958), p. 641.

[2] Ibid., p. 533.

> about me to all the angels (including the church fathers, etc.) with just this expression.[1]

Here a word or two has to be said in defence of Bonhoeffer's letters. Let us not forget that Bonhoeffer was not writing these letters from his comfortable study, but from the prison cell in the midst of bombing raids and anxieties about life. He was also not unmindful of the prison censors. He was always writing with the uneasy feeling that someone was reading it over his shoulder. And therefore we find in the letters only tantalizing hints of Bonhoeffer's constructive thinking. In a letter to Eberhard Bethge, the chief recipient and now the editor of Bonhoeffer's letters from prison, he said:

> You now ask so many important questions on the subjects that have been occupying me lately, that I should be happy if I could answer them myself. But it's all very much in the early stages; and, as usual, I'm being led on more by an instinctive feeling for questions that will arise later than by any conclusions that I've already reached about them.[2]

It is clear from Bonhoeffer's own words that his thinking never got beyond the initial stage. His early death at the hands of the Nazis in 1945 prevented him from adequately working out his ideas. And yet we have to be cautious against those who overemphasize the fragmentary character of Bonhoeffer's prison writings. These writings were, sure, incomplete; but they do not by any means lead us into total confusion. To the critique of Paul Tillich that "in fact he [Bonhoeffer] didn't live long enough for us to know what he thought,"[1] we can only reply in the words of Benjamin Reist: "This would be like asking to hear what Mozart would have composed had he lived into his seventies and never really listening to the magnificence of what he did leave us."[2] We must also not forget the dialectical element in the prison letters. These letters are by no means to be understood only through the more sensational passages; rather they are to be understood in the light of his whole theological work and as a stage which he reached in the development of that work.[3] Then we will understand that Bonhoeffer leads us neither to the abandonment of God nor even to the abandonment of religion.

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[1] World Come of Age, ed. by Ronald Gregor Smith (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), p. 90.

[2] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, ed. by Eberhard Bethge, trans. by Reginald Fuller & others (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1972), p. 325 (8 June 1944). The references here and elsewhere are to the New Greatly Enlarged Edition and will be cited hereafter as **LPP**. To avoid the confusion created by the different pagination in numerous editions of this book each reference will be followed by the date of the letter in parenthesis.

There are not many references to Marx in Bonhoeffer's writings.[4] However, it is hard to believe that Bonhoeffer was unfamiliar with Marxist philosophy. In the midst of anti-communist attitude prevailed in Germany during the Third Reich, probably Bonhoeffer might have thought of not

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[1] Cited by Ved Mehta, *The New Theologian* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 139.

[2] Benjamin Reist, *The Promise of Bonhoeffer* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1969), p. 102.

[3] For a discussion of Bonhoeffer's continuity of thought, see, John D. Godsey, *The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, MCMLX), pp. 260ff. Also see, André Dumas, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Theologian of Reality*, trans. by Robert McAfee Brown (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1971), pp. 69ff.

[4] It is appropriate here to mention the single quotation from Karl Marx which appears in Bonhoeffer's writings: "*Es ist leicht, ein Heiliger zu sein, wenn man nicht Mensch sein will*" (It is easy to be a saint if one does not wish to be a man). Bonhoeffer, Microfilm No. 395, Frame No. 60 (New York: Union Theological Seminary Library). Page 60 (not really a frame number, since there are numbers missing from the sequence of numbers included in the film) is part of a series of typed and handwritten pages, and appears among Bonhoeffer's wartime notes. Though there is no overall title for these pages, some of them are entitled "*Das Gute*." Page 60 has the title "*Das Gute und die Geschichte*." Since Bonhoeffer's *Ethik* (Zusammengestellt und herausgegeben von Eberhard Bethge, Chr. Kaiser Verlag, München, 1963) has a chapter entitled "*Die Geschichte und das Gute*" (pp. 227ff) we can perhaps assume that these pages were originally notes for *Ethik*. However, the quotation from Marx is not elaborated on either in the notes or in *Ethik*. I am indebted to Seth Kasten, Interlibrary Loan Librarian, of Union Theological Seminary (New York) for giving me valuable information regarding the nature of the microfilm.

XUM

creating an added suspicion in the mind of Hitler by encountering Marxism in his writings. Moreover, the challenge of Nazism was more dominant in the 1930's and early 1940's than that of Marxism. Anyway, in our present study, the more important point is that Bonhoeffer's critique of religion has left the impression somewhat similar to that left by Marx. Like Marx, Bonhoeffer glorified in man's powers and dreaded the often disruptive and retarding effect of religion upon these powers. Like Marx, Bonhoeffer wanted to speak to man in his strenth, in his wholehearted life and aspirations. This is why Bonhoeffer has been so popular among Christian theologians and Marxist philosophers in East Europe.[1] However, it is important to note that in spite of the similarities between Marx and Bonhoeffer there is a striking difference which is crucial for our present study: Bonhoeffer's critique of religion grew from, and was directed toward, an extraordinary faith in Christ, Lord of the world. Without this faith such a critique would be impossible. The foundation for the Christian encounter with Marxism is found in

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[1] The following three works are illustrative of this observation: 1. Milan Machovec, *Marxismus und dialektische Theologie. Barth, Bonhoeffer und Hromadka in atheistisch-kommunistischer Sicht*, trans. from Czechoslovakian by Dorothea Neumärker (Evz. Verlag, Zürich, 1965). 2. Dmitri Modestovich Ugrinovich, "'Bezreligioznoe khristiaistvo.' D. Bonhoeffera i ego prodolzhatelei," *Voprosy filosfii*, Vol. XXII, No. 2, 1968, pp. 94-102. I am indebted to John Palan of Oxford, England, for an English translation ("'Non-religious Christianity': Dietrich Bonhoeffer and His Successors") of this Russian article. I am also grateful to the English Language Section of the International Bonhoeffer Archive and Research Committee (New York) for making this unpublished translation available to me. 3. Hanfried Müller, *Von der Kirche zur Welt. Ein Beitrag zu der Beziehung des Wortes Gottes auf die societas in Dietrich Bonhoeffers theologischer Entwicklung* (Herbert Reich Evang. Verlag, Hamburg-Bergstedt, 1961). Also see, Hanfried Müller, "Concerning the Reception and Interpretation of Dietrich Bonhoeffer," *World Come of Age*, ed. by Ronald Gregor Smith (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), pp. 182-214. Geffrey B. Kelly has made a critical appraisal of these Marxist materials. Cf. "Marxist Interpretations of Bonhoeffer," *Dialog*, Vol. 10, No. 3, 1971, pp. 207-20.

Bonhoeffer's theology in the more basic framework of the confrontation of Christ with the world. His thoughts will, therefore, help us to synthesize an adequate theological approach to Marxism.

When Bonhoeffer explains what he means by religion he connects it in his mind with such terms as "metaphysical," "individualistic," etc. A religious interpretation of Christianity would be a metaphysical or an individualistic one. This kind of interpretation is valid only as long as man is "religious." But Bonhoeffer asks: what if man is no longer religious, no longer concerned with the answers given by a religious interpretation of things? What if man is not inherently religious? What happens if the religious *a priori* upon which Christian preaching and theology have rested for the last nineteen hundred years simply does not exist? Bonhoeffer is convinced that modern man cannot be religious even if he thinks he is and wants to be. If he describes himself as religious, it is obvious that he does not live up to it, or that he means something quite different. If religion is no more than a "garment of Christianity" which must now be cast aside because it has lost its meaning in a "world come of age," if the real problem facing Christianity today is not so much that of religionlessness, but precisely that of religion, then what does all this mean for the church?[1] These are the questions Bonhoeffer poses before us.

Bonhoeffer maintains that if the church is to be relevant to our time it must be ready to criticize itself and re-examine its traditional beliefs and practices. The task of theology is to consider our traditional testimony of faith as a thing for which we must answer in the present. As Daniel Jenkins asserts, "the only way in which religion can be effectively criticized is from within. The reason for this is that the only criterion for the criticism is that provided by God himself in faith."[1] This is exactly what Bonhoeffer does. He does not want to abolish religion. But he wishes to free Christianity from any necessary dependence upon "the religious premise." Our study will not be fruitful unless we clearly understand from the outset that Bonhoeffer's concepts such as "world come of age," "non-religious interpretation," "religionless Christianity," etc. are no more, and no less, than a striving after a more adequate expression of faith working through love in maturity and freedom.

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[1] Cf. *LPP*, *op. cit.*, pp. 279ff (30 April 1944).

In the first part of the present study we learned that the world in which we live is in revolution, and that it was Marx's prophetic function to have given this revolution its most radical and consistent expression in the secular world. The world has come of age in organizational, rational, and technical competence. Vast areas which once were left to the operation of natural forces are now under human control. The world has, thus, become non-religious in the sense that "God as a working hypothesis in morals, politics, or science, has been surmounted and abolished."[2] The realm of inward experience of the soul, where the life of piety used to take place, that realm of conscience, of salvation, of eternal life, of communion with a transcendent Being beyond the bounds of this earth, has faded into the background of men's consciousness. It seems no longer important. Men are busy serving themselves or their neighbours with their technical reason. They don't have time to worry about supposedly ultimate problems. The world has become mature in that it has dispensed with metaphysics, including religious metaphysics, and conducts its life on the basis of its own relative principles and knowledge, as if God did not exist.

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[1] Daniel Jenkins, Beyond Religion: The Truth and Error in 'Religionless Christianity' (London: SCM Press, 1962), p. 17.

[2] LPP, op. cit., p. 360 (16 July 1944).

Now, it is to Bonhoeffer that we owe the insight that the maturity of this world is a fact of God's providence in our time before which revolutionary impulses and Christian apologetics alike must show the respect which reality sooner or later demands of everyone. Where is Christ in such a world as this? Christ reveals to us in God's love, God's being and act, in the middle of this mature world, reconciling it to Himself out of its sin and rebellion. Reality is not to be found on the boundaries of this world, in those questions which it cannot answer and for which it therefore calls on the God-hypothesis, nor in those failures and conflicts which it cannot resolve which drive it in despair to call on some transcendent help. It is not some explanation of the relations between a divine and human realm. It is the reality of God who has come into this world in Jesus Christ.

> In Christ we are offered the possibility of partaking in the reality of God and in the reality of the world, but not in the one without the other. The reality of God discloses itself only by setting me entirely in the reality of the world, and when I encounter the reality of the world it is always already sustained, accepted and reconciled in the reality of God.[1]

This is the encounter with the secular, the mature world to which the Christian is called.

But what has been the reaction of the church to the development whereby the God of religion has been edged out of the world as the world has come to a self-assured adulthood? The whole movement has been viewed as "the great defection from God, from Christ,"[2] and the more that God and Christ have been invoked in opposition to the development, the more it has considered itself to be anti-Christian. Christian apologetics has tried to prove to the world that the world could not live without the tutelage of God, but it has been fighting losing wars, surrendering one battlefield after another. Bonhoeffer considers the attack by Christian apologetics upon the adulthood of the world to be pointless, ignoble and unchristian:

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[1] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Ethics, ed. by Eberhard Bethge, trans. by Neville Horton Smith (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1969), p. 195.

[2] LPP, op. cit., p. 326 (8 June 1944).

> Pointless, because it seems to me like an attempt to put a grown-up man back into adolescence, i.e., to make him dependent on things on which he is, in fact, no longer dependent, and thrusting him into problems that are, in fact, no longer problems to him. Ignoble, because it amounts to an attempt to exploit man's weakness for purposes that are alien to him and to which he has not freely assented. Unchristian, because it confuses Christ with the particular stage in man's religiousness, i.e., with a human law.[1]

This apologia has been carried on by religious people, who have used God as a "stopgap for their incompleteness of knowledge." This insight gives rise to Bonhoeffer's own reaction to religious and religionless people.

> I often ask myself why a 'Christian instinct' often draws me more to the religionless people than to the religious, by which I don't in the least mean with any evangelizing intention, but, I might almost say, 'in brotherhood'. While I'm often reluctant to mention God by name to religious people--because that name somehow seems to me here not to ring true, and I feel myself to be slightly dishonest (it's particularly bad when others start to talk in religious jargon; I then dry up almost completely and feel awkward and uncomfortable)--to people with no religion I can on occasion mention him by name quite calmly and as a matter of course. Religious people speak of God when human knowledge (perhaps simply because they are too lazy to think) has come to an end, or when human resources fail--in fact it is always the deus ex machina that they bring on to the scene, either for the apparent solution

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[1] LPP, op. cit., p. 327 (8 June 1944).

> of insoluble problems, or as strength in human failure--always, that is to say, exploiting human weakness or human boundaries.[1]

Even though God is driven out of the world by the surrender of the church in one area after another, there seems to be one sphere in which religious answers remained secure, and that is the sphere of the so-called ultimate questions (death, suffering, guilt, etc.) i.e., the sphere of man's inner life. If God alone can furnish an answer to the ultimate questions, then at least there is some reason why God and the church and the pastor are needed. Here again Bonhoeffer asks, if we can talk of God only on the "borders of human existence," in the "boundary situations," are we not in the final analysis trying to make room for God in the world? Are we not assigning Him His place in the world? Even in these areas, Bonhoeffer reminds us, answers are to be found nowadays that leave God right out of the picture. It is not true that "only Christianity has the answers." In fact, it is Bonhoeffer's opinion that the Christian answers are no more conclusive or compelling than any of the others.[2]

Here the church that clung to its religious interpretation and has restricted God to the private life of man comes face to face with what Bonhoeffer calls "the secularized offshoots of Christian theology, namely existentialist philosophy and the psychotherapists."[3] They, too, have the answer to life's problems, the solution to its distresses and conflicts, and their answer does not depend on God. They, too, enter into the secret recesses of man's inner, personal life and try to demonstrate to secure, happy, contented mankind that he is really unhappy and desperate, that his health is sickness, his vigor and vitality are despair. For Bonhoeffer, this is a revolt of inferiority characterized by an attitude of mistrust and suspicion toward mankind. While it affects a few intellectuals, degenerates, and egotists, it completely passes by the ordinary man who "has neither the time nor the inclination to concern himself with his existential despair, or to regard his perhaps modest share of happiness as a trial, a trouble, or a calamity."[1] This sort of "secular methodism" has its ecclesiastical counterpart in the clergy's "priestly sniffing around" in the lives of men to bring to light their sins of weakness. Bonhoeffer believes that there is a twofold theological error here: first, the notion that man can be addressed as a sinner only on the basis of his weakness; second, the idea that man's essential nature consists of his inner life. Jesus did not make every man a sinner first; he called men out of their sin, not into it. Again, the Bible does not recognize our distinction between "outer" and "inner," but is concerned with the whole man in his relation to God. Bonhoeffer believes it is imperative that the church give up all "clerical tricks" and stop regarding psychotherapy and existentialism as "God's pioneers."[2] The church must take an entirely different approach to a world come of age. And therefore Bonhoeffer says:

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[1] LPP, op. cit., pp. 281f (30 April 1944).
[2] LPP, op. cit., pp. 311f (29 May 1944).
[3] LPP, op. cit., p. 326 (8 June 1944).

> I should like to speak of God not on the boundaries but at the centre, not in weakness but in strength; and therefore not in death and guilt but in man's life and goodness. As to the boundaries, it seems to me better to be silent and leave the insoluble unsolved. . . . God is beyond in the midst of our life. The church stands, not at the boundaries where human powers give out, but in the middle of the village.[3]

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[1] LPP, op. cit., p. 327 (8 June 1944).
[2] LPP, op. cit., p. 346 (8 July 1944).
[3] LPP, op. cit., p. 282 (30 April 1944).

We shall now examine what Bonhoeffer actually meant by the phrase "the world come of age" (*die mündige Welt*). Bonhoeffer's notion of the world come of age has its roots in his *Ethics*. Referring to the eighteenth century Enlightenment he wrote:

> . . . it was not so much in the question of belief and life that emancipated reason displayed its immense power, but rather in the discovery of that mysterious correspondence between the laws of thought and the laws of nature. . . .The technical science of the modern western world has emancipated itself from any kind of subservience. It is in essence not service but mastery, mastery over nature. It was an entirely new spirit that evoked it, and it will continue only so long as this spirit continues. This is the spirit of the forcible subjugation of nature beneath the rule of the thinking and experimenting man. Technology became an end in itself. It has a soul of its own.[1]

We can see in this notion of "world come of age," as Eberhard Bethge has pointed out, the influence of Immanuel Kant's formula:

> The Enlightenment is the emergence of man from immaturity that he is himself responsible for [*aus seiner selbstverschuldeten Unmündigkeit*]. Immaturity is the incapacity to use one's own intelligence without the guidance of another person.[2]

This quote from Kant is helpful to understand the meaning of the phrase "world come of age." When Bonhoeffer speaks of the maturity of the world come of age, he does not mean the "adult maturity of the wise old sage."[3] Rather he gives the description of a situation. Maturity marks the time of responsibility. Man come of age is in no sense a perfect man or man who does not commit sin. He is a man accepting responsibility. By the use of his reason man has gradually discovered the laws by which the world lives and is regulated, not only in science, but also in social and political affairs, art, ethics and religion, and in the name of intellectual honesty he no longer uses God as a working hypothesis. Man has been left with the world on his hands. Man's attention has been turned away from worlds beyond, and toward this world and this time. It is in this sense that he is living in a world come of age. In the childhood of humanity men thought of God as the *deus ex machina*. Now that man has come of age, he thinks and lives independent of God. The premises of the religion of the childhood of humanity have disappeared. If the church can be no more in the modern world than a sort of "religious drugstore" or "religious comfort-station," Bonhoeffer believes, its fate is already sealed.

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[1] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, op. cit., p. 98.

[2] The introductory statement of Immanuel Kant's *Was ist Aufklärung?*, cited by Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Man of Vision, Man of Courage*, trans. by Eric Mosbacher & others, ed. by Edwin Robertson (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 770.

[3] John D. Godsey, "Reading Bonhoeffer in English Translation," *Bonhoeffer in a World Come of Age*, ed. by Peter Vorkink, II (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), p. 123.

Bonhoeffer speaks of the world come of age only in the context of a world which no longer needs the religious premise which has long characterized Christian preaching, devotion and self-understanding. The man come of age is one whose work, family, education, and awareness of the world have made daily recourse to God unnecessary. Bonhoeffer would have us think of the world come of age as revealing God's gift of freedom and of the world to man.

> Thus the world's coming of age is no longer an occasion for polemics and apologetics, but is now really better understood than it understands itself, namely on the basis of the gospel and in the light of Christ.[1]

The man come of age affirms the temporal, this-worldly character of existence. There is, for him, only this world; there is no other world. He is concerned with the tasks and the problems of this world. He is disturbed to notice that the religious man is more interested in eternity

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[1] *LPP*, *op. cit.*, p. 329 (8 June 1944).

XUM

and the otherworldly. Because the mind of the religious man is taken up with the "world to come" and with the desire to attain salvation in that world, he is said to have neglected the problems of this world. For him praying, worshipping, singing hymns, fasting, meditating, going on retreats and such are the most important activities of life. But for the man come of age such practices seem shadowy and unreal by comparison with our secular activities. He is critical of the time that the religious man spends in prayer and worship.

This is why Bonhoeffer insists that we must love God in our lives:

> I believe that we ought so to love and trust God in our lives, and in all the good things that he sends us, that when the time comes (but not before!) we may go to him with love, trust, and joy. . . .We ought to find and love God in what he actually gives us; if it pleases him to allow us to enjoy some overwhelming earthly happiness, we mustn't try to be more pious than God himself and allow our happiness to be corrupted by presumption and arrogance, and by unbridled religious fantasy which is never satisfied with what God gives.[1]

We have to accept gratefully the earthly affections, pleasures, health, achievements and knowledge as the blessings of God. He repeatedly speaks of the natural, the earthly, the human, because Christ is the "New Man," the "True Humanity." This helps us to recognize the world come of age. Bonhoeffer would have us stop thinking of world come of age primarily as a turning away from God, for he is not speaking of atheism, and would not describe himself as an atheist. Rather he believes that, since man has ceased to be religious and since the laws which he has discovered have their origin and essence in Jesus Christ, today's godless, secular man is ripe for the Christian message that Jesus

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[1] LPP, op. cit., p. 168 (18 December 1943).

Christ is the Lord of the world, that the world stands ever before God, the one who is Creator, Reconciler and Redeemer and who refuses to be a deus ex machina. This is what Bonhoeffer means when he asserts that "the world that has come of age is more godless, and perhaps for that very reason nearer to God, than the world before its coming of age."[1] This is no sanctioning of the world's godlessness, but rather a recognition that it is a hopeful godlessness. "Our coming of age," says Bonhoeffer, "leads us to a true recognition of our situation before God."[2] It is by this reasoning, namely, by a bold effort to answer the question of how Jesus Christ can become Lord even of the religionless, that Bonhoeffer arrived at his conclusion that the church should work out and proclaim a "non-religious" interpretation of Biblical and theological concepts.

Bonhoeffer proclaimed the world's coming of age in the name of the crucified and risen Christ and saw it as a necessary part of his Christology. It was the crucified and risen Christ who made possible the coming of age. Bonhoeffer found that the recognition of the world's autonomy is neither philosophy nor phenomenology, but the knowledge of God which seeks to follow God where He has already preceded us. That is why Bonhoeffer's statement about the world come of age is first and last a theological statement. A curse or blessing is always pronounced over something that has come into being, determining its future progress. It was hitherto the case that the church not only did not bless the autonomously evolving world, but condemned it and called it godless. If the church makes no declaration that the world has come of age, then the world itself must declare its autonomy.

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[1] LPP, op. cit., p. 362 (18 July 1944).
[2] LPP, op. cit., p. 360 (16 July 1944).

Since Bonhoeffer never ceases to think dialectically, what he says about the world's coming of age has two levels. The Gospel of the *theologia crucis* has room for the world come of age and even accepts the fact that such a world may deny the Gospel, but this acceptance includes assisting the world at the same time to become truly itself. The paradoxical unity of the *theologia crucis* and the world come of age finds expression in the following passage:

> . . . we have to live in the world *etsi deus non daretur*. And this is just what we do recognize--before God! God himself compels us to recognize it. So our coming of age leads us to a true recognition of our situation before God. God would have us know that we must live as men who manage our lives without him. The God who is with us is the God who forsakes us (Mark 15:34). The God who lets us live in the world without the working hypothesis of God is the God before whom we stand continually. Before God and with God we live without God [that is to say, without God as a working hypothesis]. God lets himself be pushed out of the world on to the cross. He is weak and powerless in the world, and that is precisely the way, the only way, in which he is with us and helps us.[1]

Bonhoeffer says further that the knowledge of the world's coming of age can help us to a better understanding of the Gospel.

> To that extent we may say that the development towards the world's coming of age outlined above, which has done away with a false conception of God, opens up a way of seeing the God of the Bible, who wins power and space in the world by his weakness.[2]

The lordship of Christ corresponds to worldliness, and discipleship to a sharing in this world; the natural, the profane, the rational and the humane are placed not against but with this Christ--this is what Bonhoeffer means by the phrase "world come of age."

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[1] *Ibid*.

[2] *LPP*, *op*. *cit*., p. 261 (16 July 1944).

The implications of Bonhoeffer's concept of "world come of age" is significant to our encounter with Marxism. We can understand it better in the light of the ongoing debate on secularization and secularism. Secularization is the result of the self-understanding of man. Science and technology, of course, have played a vital role in this changed outlook of man. Man perceives himself as a creative subject. He becomes aware that he is an agent of history, responsible for his own destiny. This new self-understanding of man necessarily brings in its wake a different way of conceiving his relationship with God. As Gustavo Gutierrez observes, secularization is a process which not only coinsides perfectly with a Christian vision of man, of history, and of the cosmos; it also favors a more complete fulfillment of the Christian life insofar as it offers man the possibility of being more fully human.[1] He adds:

> Biblical faith does indeed affirm the existence of creation as distinct from the Creator; it is the proper sphere of man, whom God himself has proclaimed lord of this creation. Worldliness, therefore, is a must, a necessary condition for an authentic relationship between man and nature, of men among themselves, and finally, between man and God.[2]

Secularism, on the other hand, refers to the more rigid attitude of those who hold that only through science is any trustworthy knowledge to be attained and that only the tangible and human affairs of this world are worthy of attention.

Worth mentioning here is the excellent study made by Friedrich Gogarten on the distinction between secularization and secularism. According to him, secularization refers to the historical process itself which we described above. Secularism, on the contrary, is an ideology which tends to contain this process within a framework which excludes all religious values.[1]

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[1] Cf. Gustavo Guiterrez, A Theology of Liberation, op. cit., p. 67.
[2] Ibid.

It is easy to understand from this description of Gogarten that Bonhoeffer's concept of world come of age falls under the category of secularization and that Marx's description of world's autonomy falls under the ideology of secularism. Bonhoeffer's radical acceptance of secularization does not at all rule out a life which is lived in an arcane discipline (Arkandisziplin) of prayer and meditation, of study, worship and silence. While his invitation to affirm the world's coming of age has all the marks of a new theological version of the Enlightenment, he also urges Christians to be disciplined, to avoid "the shallow and banal this worldliness of the enlightened [Aufgeklärten]."[2] At the same time he wants us to turn from God's beyond to the world's here and now, from church to world (von der Kirche zur Welt), to use Hanfried Müller's phrase. Here it is not simply a matter of abandoning God's beyond, of passing from church to world, from prayer to work, but of rethinking transcendence as the center of our lives. "God is beyond in the midst of our life."[3] The world come of age is not nearer to God than to the world of tutelage; indeed, it is more godless, "and perhaps for that very reason nearer to God."[1] This dialectical tension found in Bonhoeffer's thought is significant that it remains a solid Christian response to the autonomy of the world Marx proclaims. Living wholeheartedly in the world is neither an abandonment of God nor a revolt against God; rather it is accepting the freedom given by God with a sense of responsibility. Bonhoeffer is certain that if faith is to have any chance at all of being non-religious, it must ultimately be not so much a candidacy for the next world[2] but rather a complete acceptance of responsibility for the world. He takes freedom and responsibility seriously in the light of the scripture:

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[1] Cf. Friedrich Gogarten, Despair and Hope for Our Time, trans. by Thomas Wieser (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1970), pp. 102ff. See also, John Macquarrie, God and Secularity (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, MCMLXVII). The debate on secularization and secularism has deep ecumenical dimension. Two documents are important in this connection: 1. "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," The Documents of Vatican II, ed. by Walter M. Abbott (New York: Guild Press, 1966), pp. 199ff. 2. World Conference on Church and Society, Geneva, July 12-26, 1966: Official Report (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1967).

[2] LPP, op. cit., p. 369 (21 July 1944).

[3] LPP, op. cit., p. 282 (30 April 1944).

> In the language of the Bible, freedom is not something man has for himself but something he has for others. . . . Freedom is not a quality of man, nor is it an ability, a capacity, a kind of being that somehow flares up in him. . . .In truth, freedom is a relationship between two persons. Being free means "being free for the other," because the other has bound me to him. Only in relationship with the other am I free.[3]

Bonhoeffer maintains that the freedom and responsibility to which we are called presupposes the going out of ourself and the breaking down of our selfishness. The fullness fo the world come of age is communion with other men. "Thus the autonomy of 'the world come of age', of which he [Bonhoeffer] now begins to speak, is not to be understood as the freedom of a Titan, but rather a freedom born of humility."[4]

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[1] LPP, op. cit., p. 362 (18 July 1944).

[2] Here the reference is to Feuerbach. Feuerbach regarded it as his task "to transform friends of God into friends of man, believers into thinkers, devotees of prayer into devotees of work, candidates for the hereafter into students of this world, Christians who, by their own profession and admission, are 'half animal, half angel' into men, into whole men." See, Ludwig Feuerbach, Lectures on the Essence of Religion, trans. by Ralph Manheim (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), p. 285.

[3] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Creation and Fall: A Theological Interpretation of Genesis 1-3, trans. by John C. Fletcher (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1969), p. 37.

[4] Eberhard Bethge, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, op. cit., pp. 757f.

Before we proceed to the necessary non-religious interpretation, we shall now consider what the implications of the world come of age are for the contemporary church. The autonomy of the world come of age of which Bonhoeffer speaks is to be understood as a realization born of humility. We churchmen must confess that we are disturbed when we realize that human hope and the world's coming of age are inescapably connected. One of our shortcomings is that, when particular areas of life which once were under direct ecclesiastical control become autonomous, we assume that this represents a victory for faithless secularism. It is true that this autonomy can be achieved in such a way as to deny God's lordship. But at the same time we must admit the possibility that it can be achieved in such a way as to express true Christian maturity in freedom. This admission will help us to evaluate our encounter with Marxism and will show us a new vista of strategy to fulfill our tasks in relation to secular institution.

The guiding principle for Christians in this realm is that of identification with the world. "The only way to follow Jesus was by living in the world."[1] We are part of the world Christ came to save and we cannot participate in his saving act unless we do so at those places in the world where we live alongside fellow human beings, whether or not they bear a Christian name. We Christians must try to discover the will of God not only in the life of the church but also in the various spheres of our secular calling. Christ meets us in the Bible, in the preaching, in the sacraments and in the fellowship of the church; but he also meets us no less in the spirit at all places where we have to make a decision. As Daniel Jenkins stated, the primary task of the church is not to safeguard her earthly form as one institution among many, but

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[1] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, trans. by R. H. Fuller (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1968), p. 51.

> to make manifest the transforming power of Christ in the life of mankind every day, through the institutions of the family, the school, the state, the industrial organization and all others which make up the fabric of the life of mankind.[1]

God called Israel, and calls us, not for the sake of any special worthiness or favour, but for the sake of the world. In other words, the church is called to the service of mankind and of the world. This is election not to privilege, but to engagement in servanthood. The church lives in order that the world may know its true being. God calls us in order to send us back into the world as His witness. This means that the church has a mission; that is to say, the church is sent by God for a special purpose. Her purpose, her special concern, is not just to convert individuals into church members, but to make a whole approach to society and to all parts of life.

So to sum up Bonhoeffer's thoughts on "world come of age": Obviously, by this phrase he means two things. First, the large measure of control given man over nature by the discovery of the scientific method. Second, the awareness that the modern man is no longer under either the tutelage or the control of "gods," but is called to freedom and responsibility. He does not need religion in the limited sense nor is he able to live for long on the basis of behavior dictated by institutions for which he holds uncritical reverence. He is compelled now to live with his freedom. He is heir to the Messianic Kingdom and has been compelled to enter into some of the privileges and responsibilities of his heritage."[1] The coming of age of man means that he cannot live any longer under the "gods." He can only find the fulfillment of his freedom in the bond-service of Christ.

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[1] Daniel Jenkins, op. cit., p. 82.

Bonhoeffer is increasingly aware that there is a radical disparity between the world into which he was born and the world of the second world war. This new world is one in which there is no traditional culture or faith as a ground beneath one's feet. It is a world in which "the great masquerade of evil" is manifest, and in which rationalism, moral fanaticism, conscience, and duty have failed. Who can face this world?

> Only the man whose final standard is not his reason, his principles, his conscience, his freedom, or his virtue, but who is ready to sacrifice all this when he is called to obedient and responsible action in faith and in exclusive allegiance to God--the responsible man, who tries to make his whole life an answer to the question and call of God.[2]

How is it possible to be obedient and responsible people with exclusive allegiance to God? Certainly not by confining ourselves within the walls of the church, but by our serving presence in the world. But the religion of the childhood of humanity has always been an obstacle for this serving presence, and now the modern man has realized that he can get along quite well without such a religion. Observing that the death of religion is an established fact and is a historic liberating force for the world Bonhoeffer can accept a world built upon and daily guided by secular hopes. He finds the religionless condition of the twentieth century man to be the foundation for the new form of Christianity. By this he does not mean new institutional patterns, but rather a drastic change in the church's inner self-awareness. He finds the guidelines for this new understanding of the church in what he calls "non-religious interpretation" of Biblical and theological concepts.

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[1] Cf. Friedrich Gogarten, The Reality of Faith: The Problem of Subjectivism in Theology, trans. by Carl Michalson & others (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, MCMLIX), pp. 55ff.

[2] LPP, op. cit., p. 5 ("After Ten Years: A Reckoning Made at New Year 1943").

CHAPTER VII

Non-religious Interpretation

In the last two decades Bonhoeffer's concepts of "non-religious interpretation" and "religionless Christianity" have attracted widespread attention.[1] Though both these concepts are interrelated, in German speaking countries the discussion has focused on the expression "non-religious interpretation," whereas in the English world the key phrase has been "religionless Christianity." The dominance of Bultmann School and the consequent orientation toward problems of interpretation might be the reason why "non-religious interpretation" attracted the German theologians. The interest in "religionless Christianity" in the English world may be attributed to the religious crisis we find in the more secularized societies of that region. However, both the concepts are important for an adequate understanding of the development of Bonhoeffer's thinking. In this chapter we shall examine the concept of "non-religious interpretation."

Bonhoeffer wanted the faith to be understood as a demand to live radically in the midst of the world:

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[1] To mention some major works: André Dumas, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Theologian of Reality, op. cit.*; Ernst Feil, *Die Theologie Dietrich Bonhoeffers: Hermeneutik, Christologie, Weltverständnis* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1971); John D. Godsey, *The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, op. cit.*; William Kuhns, *In Pursuit of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Dayton: Pflaum Press, 1967); Hanfried Müller, *Von der Kirche zur Welt, op. cit.*; Heinrich Ott, *Reality and Faith: The Theological Legacy of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, trans. by Alex A. Morrison (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972); John A. Phillips, *The Form of Christ in the World: A Study of Bonhoeffer's Christology* (London: Collins, 1967); and James W. Woelfel, *Bonhoeffer's Theology: Classical and Revolutionary* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1970).

XUM

> . . . it is only by living completely in this world that one learns to have faith. One must completely abandon any attempt to make something of oneself, whether it be a saint, or a converted sinner, or a churchman (a so-called priestly type!), a righteous man or an unrighteous one, a sick man or a healthy one. By this worldliness I mean living unreservedly in life's duties, problems, successes and failures, experiences and perplexities. In so doing we throw ourselves completely into the arms of God, taking seriously, not our own sufferings, but those of God in the world--watching with Christ in Gethsemane. That, I think, is faith; that is _metanoia_; and that is how one becomes a man and a Christian (cf. Jer. 45!).[1]

This is the direction in which he would have the Biblical concepts drive. They are to be interpreted in terms of responsible involvement in the world. Metaphysical and individualistic terms cannot perform that function, and that is why he calls for a non-religious interpretation.

But what exactly did Bonhoeffer mean by "non-religious interpretation?"[2] As one of his more perceptive interpreters has pointed out, "It is much easier to grasp what [Bonhoeffer] meant by 'religious' than 'non-religious'."[3] Therefore, let us begin our discussion of non-religious interpretation, first, by considering what actually Bonhoeffer meant by the term "religious."

Even during the early days in the prison Bonhoeffer expressed growing intolerance of the "religious." He wrote:

> Don't be alarmed; I shall not come out of here a _homo religiosus_! On the contrary, my fear and distrust of 'religiosity' have become greater than ever here. The fact that the Israelites _never_ uttered the name of God always makes me think, and I can understand it better as I go on.[4]

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[1] _LPP_, _op_. _cit_., pp. 369f (21 July 1944).

[2] Instead of "non-religious interpretation," sometimes Bonhoeffer also uses the expressions "worldly interpretation," and "secular interpretation."

[3] John D. Godsey, _The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer_, _op_. _cit_., p. 274.

[4] _LPP_, _op_. _cit_., p. 135 (21 November 1943).

And so later, we find, Bonhoeffer rejected the thesis of "religious a priori." He explained this rejection profoundly in these words:

> The time when people could be told everything by means of words, whether theological or pious, is over, and so is the time of inwardness and conscience--and that means the time of religion in general. We are moving towards a completely religionless time; people as they are now simply cannot be religious any more. Even those who honestly describe themselves as 'religious' do not in the least act up to it, and so they presumably mean something quite different by 'religious'.
> Our whole nineteen hundred year old Christian preaching and theology rest on the 'religious a priori' of mankind. 'Christianity' has always been a form--perhaps the true form--of 'religion'. But if one day it becomes clear that this a priori does not exist at all, but was a historically conditioned and transient form of human self-expression, and if therefore man becomes radically religionless--and I think that that is already more or less the case (else how is it, for example, that this war, in contrast to all previous ones, is not calling forth any 'religious' reaction?)--what does that mean for 'Christianity'?[1]

In the prison letters Bethge identifies several characteristics of Bonhoeffer's view of religion.[2] Though for our minds some of these charateristics may look insignificant, Bonhoeffer considers them actually present in religion in such a way as to limit the challenge of Jesus Christ to specific directions. Let us consider here six of these characteristics.

1. "To 'interpret in a religious sense' . . . I think it means to speak on the one hand metaphysically."[3] Bonhoeffer criticizes religion as a metaphysically determined entity. Here, he is not thinking in terms of "immanence-transcendence," in order then to eliminate transcendence in favour of immanence. Rather, he is concerned to regain a genuine this-worldly transcendence, in contrast to a valueless metaphysics,

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[1] LPP, op. cit., pp. 279f (30 April 1944).
[2] Cf. Bethge, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, op. cit., pp. 776-81.
[3] LPP, op. cit., pp. 285f (5 May 1944).

as a "partial extension of the world"[1] and as a necessary prerequisite to any faith.

> It is not with the beyond that we are concerned, but with this world as created and preserved, subjected to laws, reconciled, and restored. What is above this world is, in the Gospel, intended to exist for this world.[2]

2. "To 'interpret in a religious sense' . . . means to speak . . . on the other hand individualistically."[3] Here Bonhoeffer's criticism is against religion as an individualistic entity. He considered the time of religion to have been "the time of inwardness and conscience."[4] As early as 1927, in Sanctorum Communio, Bonhoeffer emphasized the social element in all Christian concepts. In a world come of age he became more sensitive to this social element and criticized the old individualistic inwardness.

3. Bonhoeffer maintains that the Biblical understanding of God directs us to a powerless and suffering God who is with us and who calls us to share his suffering for the sake of the world. In contrast to this, "Man's religiosity makes him look in his distress to the power of God in the world: God is the deus ex machina."[5] On another occasion he says:

> Religious people speak of God when human knowledge (perhaps simply because they are too lazy to think) come to an end, or when human resources fail--in fact it is always the deus ex machina that they bring on to the scene, either for the apparent solution of insoluble problems, or as strength in human failure--

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[1] LPP, op. cit., p. 381 ("Outline for a Book")
[2] LPP, op. cit., p. 286 (5 May 1944).
[3] LPP, op. cit., p. 285f (5 May 1944).
[4] LPP, op. cit., p. 279 (30 April 1944).
[5] LPP, op. cit., p. 361 (16 July 1944).

> always, that is to say, exploiting human weakness or human boundaries.[1]

This same criticism of religion is found in his poem "Christians and Pagans": "Men go to God when they are sore bestead."[2] Christian religion is made out to be a sort of religious drugstore, an escape from real life and from mature responsibility for it. God does not stand in to fill the gaps. Bonhoeffer has stated this point with much clarity in the letter of Christmas Eve, 1943:

> It is nonsense to say that God fills the gap; he doesn't fill it, but on the contrary, he keeps it empty and so helps us to keep alive our former communion with each other, even at the cost of pain.[3]

4. Another characteristic of religion, as Bonhoeffer finds it, is what he calls its nature of partiality. He observes that Christian religion has become a separate part among the other parts of life, a mere section of the whole. This is because of the partial nature of religion in contrast to "faith". "The 'religious act' is always something partial, 'faith' is something whole, involving the whole of one's life."[4]

5. A further characteristic of religion is its privileged character. Bonhoeffer constantly fought to overcome unwarranted religious privilege. This concern may be recognized in one of the questions he raises:

> In what way are we 'religionless-secular' Christians, in what way are we the εκ-κλησια, those who are called forth, not regarding ourselves from a religious point of view as specially favoured, but rather as belonging wholly to the world?[5]

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[1] LPP, op. cit., pp. 281f (30 April 1944).
[2] LPP, op. cit., p. 348 ("Christians and Pagans").
[3] LPP, op. cit., p. 176 (Christmas Eve 1943).
[4] LPP, op. cit., p. 362 (18 July 1944).
[5] LPP, op. cit., pp. 280f (30 April 1944).

He points out that religion has become essentially a way of distinguishing people: Christians against non-Christians, theists against atheists, or whites against coloured peoples.

6. Closely connected with the privileged character of religion we find another characteristic to which Bonhoeffer points, namely, the role religion plays as the "guardian" of man. Religion takes for granted that man has not yet become mature. He finds fault with "religious interpretation" in that it establishes priests and theologians as the guardians and the rulers of the people of the church, and thus creates in them a state of dependence. "The church must share in the secular problems of ordinary human life, not dominating, but helping and serving."[1] Bonhoeffer urges us to accept responsibility to others and to make possible the mature cooperation and partnership of the world.

It is true that Bonhoeffer's critique of religion, in its most comprehensive historical, psychological and theological form, is found in the prison writings. But this does not mean that the critique of religion is something which he developed only during the prison days. His earlier writings show clear indication of his growing uneasiness toward religion. For example, in some of his writings he rejected religion as a purely spiritual, inner, pious feeling which offered "emotional uplift" and was based in human needs and desires.[2] As a young assistant minister in Spain he already expressed thoughts that read like an anticipation of his last writings. Thus he wrote as early as 1928 in a letter to Helmut Rössler,

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[1] LPP, op. cit., p. 382f ("Outline for a Book").

[2] Cf. Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, op. cit., pp. 63, 98; Bonhoeffer, Life Together, trans. by John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper & Row, 1954), pp. 26f, 37; and Bonhoeffer, The Way to Freedom: Letters, Lectures and Notes, 1935-1939, ed. by E. H. Robertson, trans. by E. H. Robertson & John Bowden (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), pp. 70, 230f.

> One thing strikes me again and again: here one meets people as they are, away from the masquerade of the 'Christian world', people with passions, criminal types, little people with little ambitions, little desires and little sins, all in all people who feel homeless in both senses of the word, who loosen up if one talks to them in a friendly way, real people; I can only say that I have gained the impression that it is just these people who are much more under grace than under wrath, and that it is the Christian world which is more under wrath than under grace.[1]

In some other writings he was critical of religion as wishfulness which expected God to satisfy men's personal needs--a theme central in the prison letters.[2] Another theme found in an earlier writing, which Bonhoeffer developed later in the letters, is the provincial, limited character of religion, in contrast to genuine faith which encompasses the whole life.[3] His attack on the otherworldliness of religion is found in a 1932 address, "Thy Kingdom Come!". Otherworldliness is rooted in human weakness whereas Christ "makes man strong."[4]

Once we understand Bonhoeffer's criticism of "religious," then it is rather easy to understand what he meant by "non-religious." The critique of religion, as we enumerated it in the preceding paragraphs, confronted Bonhoeffer immediately with a new problem: finding a non-religious language to interpret the Biblical and theological concepts. Obviously this meant taking the adulthood of the world seriously; also it precludes using God in relation to our deficiencies. Bonhoeffer agonized with this problem in a meditation he prepared for the occasion of the baptism of Bethge's son, Dietrich Wilhelm Rüdiger. He reflected upon how the ancient words pronounced over the child would be perhaps equally an enigma to the baby and to the adults who heard them:

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[1] Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords: Letters, Lectures and Notes, 1928-1936*, ed. by E. H. Robertson (New York: The Fontana Library, 1970), pp. 33f.

[2] Cf. Bonhoeffer, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Eberhard Bethge (6 vols.; Chr. Kaiser Verlag München, 1958-75), Vol. IV, pp. 65f, 142, hereafter cited as *GS*. Also see, Bonhoeffer, *No Rusty Swords*, *op. cit.*, pp. 239ff.

[3] Cf. Bonhoeffer, *The Way to Freedom*, op. cit., p. 232n.

[4] Cf. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Thy Kingdom Come: The Prayer of the Church for God's Kingdom on Earth," *Preface to Bonhoeffer: The Man and Two of His Shorter Writings*, ed. by John D. Godsey (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), pp. 28f.

> Reconciliation and redemption, regeneration and the Holy Spirit, love of our enemies, cross and resurrection, life in Christ and Christian discipleship--all these things are so difficult and so remote that we hardly venture any more to speak of them.[1]

These have been rendered meaningless by a scientifically and technologically oriented culture. Therefore, Bonhoeffer calls for a new language which will be capable of renewing and changing the world:

> It will be a new language, perhaps quite non-religious, but liberating and redeeming--as was Jesus' language; it will be the language of a new righteousness and truth, proclaiming God's peace with men and the coming of his kingdom.[2]

In undertaking a non-religious interpretation of Biblical and theological concepts such as he proposes, Bonhoeffer believes, the church would only be permitting the Bible to assume its own true character; for the Bible knows nothing of the "religious" in the sense enumerated above. Religion is concerned with "inwardness;" the Bible with the whole man. Religion is "individualistic," while the Bible is concerned with the corporate existence. Religion is "metaphysical," i.e., interested in a world beyond, whereas the Bible is concerned with the renewal of this world. This non-religiousness is clear both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. We should remember that "Jesus calls men, not to a new religion, but to life."[3] Christ calls us out of our "being-for-self" into sharing his suffering for the world, into "being-for-others."

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[1] LPP, op. cit., pp. 299f ("Thoughts on the Day of the Baptism of D. W. R. Bethge").

[2] Ibid., p. 300.

[3] LPP, op. cit., p. 362 (18 July 1944).

"That, I think, is faith; that is metanoia; and that is how one becomes a man and a Christian."[1] This central confrontation, this being called to participate in the suffering of Christ, must be, Bonhoeffer says, the starting point of our "secular interpretation."

To illuminate our discussion of Bonhoeffer's understanding of non-religious interpretation, let us examine his criticism of the methods of non-religious interpretation adopted by Karl Barth and by Rudolph Bultmann. Referring to the initiative taken by Karl Barth along lines of non-religious interpretation, Bonhoeffer makes the following statements:

> Barth, who is the only one to have started along this line of thought, did not carry it to completion, but arrived at a positivism of revelation, which in the last analysis is essentially a restoration.[2]
> Barth was the first theologian to begin the criticism of religion, and that remains his really great merit; but he put in its place a positivist doctrine of revelation which says, in effect, 'Like it or lump it'.[3]
>
> He [Barth] brought in against religion the God of Jesus Christ, 'pneuma against sarx'. That remains his greatest service (his Epistle to the Romans, second edition, in spite of all the neo-Kantian egg-shells). Through his later dogmatics, he enabled the church to effect this distinction, in principle, all along the line. It was not in ethics, as is often said, that he subsequently failed--his ethical observations, as far as they exist, are just as important as his dogmatic ones--; it was that in the non-religious interpretation of theological concepts he gave no concrete guidance, either in dogmatics or in ethics. There lies his limitation, and because of it his theology of revelation has become positivist, a 'positivism of revelation', as I put it.[4]

Bonhoeffer believed that Barth has started on the right line of thought, that is, away from liberal theology and the identification of Christianity with religion, but had failed to carry through to a logical conclusion.

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[1] LPP, op. cit., p. 370 (21 July 1944).
[2] LPP, op. cit., p. 280 (30 April 1944).
[3] LPP, op. cit., p. 286 (5 May 1944).
[4] LPP, op. cit., p. 328 (8 June 1944).

In other words, instead of proceeding to a non-religious interpretation of Biblical and theological concepts, he stopped at what Bonhoeffer calls "positivism of revelation," meaning that Barth had reformulated the traditional doctrines of the church into a dogmatic system, all parts of which (virgin birth, Trinity, etc.) were of equal importance and had to be accepted as a whole or not at all. The church, then, could proclaim the whole as "revelation" and could more or less say to the world "Like it or lump it." Bonhoeffer does not believe that this is in accord with the Bible in which there are "degrees of knowledge and degrees of significance."[1] His criticism is that the mature world, which no longer understands the traditional terminology, would surely "lump it" and it would go its own way and be left to its own devices. Bonhoeffer finds that Barth's "positivism of revelation" only serves the same purpose of "religion" which is under his own severe criticism.[2]

The basis of Bonhoeffer's criticism of Barth's efforts is his understanding of the church. His vision is of a church that takes seriously her call to participate in the being of Christ in the world, a church who loves the world so much that she does not try to impose upon it some absolute doctrines, but rather shares willingly and joyfully in its immediate realities. Only a community that is willing to live and suffer in, for, and with the world in its common life will be able to speak God's reconciling word.

Bonhoeffer thinks that Bultmann intended to go beyond Barth, but actually slipped back in the direction of liberal theology:

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[1] LPP, op. cit., p. 286 (5 May 1944).
[2] We will discuss this point in detail in the following chapter.

> Bultmann seems to have somehow felt Barth's limitations, but he misconstrues them in the sense of liberal theology, and so goes off into the typical liberal process of reduction--the 'mythological' elements of Christianity are dropped, and Christianity is reduced to its 'essence'.[1]

One of the earliest and most penetrating criticism of Bultmann's "New Testament and Mythology"[2] was made by Bonhoeffer, who said of that essay,

> My view of it today would be, not that he went 'too far', as most people thought, but that he didn't go far enough. It's not only the 'mythological' concepts, such as miracle, ascension, and so on (which are not in principle separable from the concepts of God, faith, etc.), but 'religious' concepts generally, which are problematic. You can't, as Bultmann supposes, separate God and miracle, but you must be able to interpret and proclaim both in a 'non-religious' sense. Bultmann's approach is fundamentally still a liberal one (i.e. abridging the gospel), whereas I'm trying to think theologically.[3]

In this regard we must question whether Bonhoeffer really understands Bultmann's view of "demythologizing" when he considers it a typical liberal reduction process aimed at eliminating myth in order to expose the essence of Christianity.[4] Bonhoeffer says,

> My view is that the full content, including the 'mythological' concepts, must be kept--the New Testament is not a mythological clothing of a universal truth; this mythology (resurrection etc.) is the thing itself--but the concepts must be interpreted in such a way as not to make religion a precondition of faith (Cf. Paul and circumcision).[5]

Here Bonhoeffer appears unsure of what Bultmann actually meant. If this is what Bonhoeffer means by non-religious interpretation of New Testament material, then, he is in close proximity to Bultmann. Bonhoeffer's criticism that Bultmann employs the typical liberal process is a mistaken judgment.

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[1] LPP, op. cit., pp. 328f (8 June 1944).

[2] Rudolf Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," Kerygma and Myth, ed. by Hans Werner Bartsch, trans. by Reginald F. Fuller (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), pp. 1-44.

[3] LPP, op. cit., p. 285 (5 May 1944).

[4] For a comparative study of Bonhoeffer and Bultmann, see, Russell W. Palmer, "Demythologizing and Non-religious Interpretation: A Comparison of Bultmann and Bonhoeffer," The Iliff Review, Vol. 31, Spring 1974, pp. 3-15.

[5] LPP, op. cit., p. 329 (8 June 1944).

Bultmann's theology is radically distinct from the exegesis of the liberals. The liberal school was inclined to discard as mythical all the images which surrounded what they judged to be the "essential Gospel," which they strictly limited to a body of immanent truths and values. Bultmann is distinct from the liberals on two points. First, while the liberals tried to do away with transcendence, Bultmann acknowledges transcendence in its most exalted form, as a "dramatic invasion" of the divine into the history of man. The second distinction is that of his conception of myth and the role of myth. It is not Bultmann's intention to eliminate the mythological, but to give it an existential interpretation. As Bultmann put it, "whereas the older liberals used criticism to eliminate the mythology of the New Testament, our task today is to use criticism to interpret it."[1] For Bultmann transcendence is no longer an attribute of God, but a dimension of man, a dimension of our own experiences and acts.

Whether or not Bultmann's exegesis yields to the temptation of reduction, contrary to his intention, is a question which is beyond the scope of this study. However, it can be said that alongside the so-called "liberal reduction," there is in Bultmann's exegesis a theologically legitimate reduction, and that Bonhoeffer himself comes close to Bultmann in the latter sense. In the course of his non-religious interpretation Bonhoeffer sees the "mythological" in conformity with the

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[1] Bultmann, op. cit., p. 12.

"religious," so that non-religious interpretation in itself means the liberation of the Bible message from mythological understanding. Bonhoeffer considers the designation of Christianity as a religion of redemption a cardinal error "which separates Christ from the Old Testament and interprets him on the lines of the myths about redemption."[1] He adds:

> The difference between the Christian hope of resurrection and the mythological hope is that the former sends a man back to his life on earth in a wholly new way which is even more sharply defined than it is in the Old Testament. The Christian, unlike the devotees of the redemption myths, has no last line of escape available from earthly tasks and difficulties into the eternal, but, like Christ himself ('My God, why hast thou forsaken me?'), he must drink the earthly cup to the dregs, and in his doing so is the crucified and risen Lord with him, and he crucified and risen with Christ. This world must not be prematurely written off; in this the Old and New Testaments are at one. Redemption myths arise from human boundary experiences, but Christ takes hold of a man at the centre of his life.[2]

Bonhoeffer is describing here the antithesis of faith and religion. It will be good here to compare this description of Bonhoeffer's with Bultmann's criticism of the History of Religions school. Bultmann wrote:

> Religion for them was an expression of the human yearning to rise above the world and transcend it: it was the discovery of a supramundane sphere where the soul could detach itself from all earthly care and find its rest. Hence the supreme manifestation of religion was to be found not in personal ethics or in social idealism but in the cultus regarded as an end in itself.[3]

Thus we find that Bultmann and Bonhoeffer actually share a common interest in interpreting the Christian faith to twentieth century man. However, there is one difference--whereas Bultmann's demythologizing involves primarily the academic question of hermeneutics, Bonhoeffer's non-religious interpretation is concerned not only with the hermeneutical question, but with the question of the existence of the church itself. It was Bonhoeffer's conviction that only a church whose message is a part of her own being, a church who witnesses in obedience to her own ultimate concern through her actions, is able to exegete and proclaim the word of God to a world come of age.

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[1] LPP, op. cit., p. 336 (27 June 1944).
[2] Ibid., pp. 336f.
[3] Bultmann, op. cit., p. 14.

Bonhoeffer begins the non-religious interpretation with this concern for the church. He wants to apply this kind of interpretation to all central concepts of theology. He has dealt extensively with this interpretation especially in his approach to the theological concepts of faith, repentance, God, Christ, sin and the church. For example, in his references to sin he wants to begin in the center: "It is not the sins of weakness, but the sins of strength, which matter here."[1] His method is also seen in his view of the church in the center of life, living wholly for the world. As Clifford Green has pointed out, "From the center of life, under the lordship of the servant Christ, for the world: this is the manner of the non-religious interpretation, this is the approach which is weltliche."[2]

We should remember that Bonhoeffer's non-religious interpretation does not arise out of any doubts about Christ, but is first and last a Christological interpretation. He always tries to pursue Christological

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[1] LPP, op. cit., p. 345 (8 July 1944).

[2] Clifford Green, "Bonhoeffer's Concept of Religion," Union Seminary Quarterly Review, Vol. XIX, No. 1, 1963, p. 19.

XUM

questions by means of non-religious interpretation. This interrelation between non-religious interpretation and Christological interpretation

> was so vital for Bonhoeffer that he lost interest when the two elements were separated: *Christology* not qualified by something like non-religious interpretation became an unrelated entity and suffered a fatal loss of reality; *non-religious Christianity* without Christocentrism became a Sisyphean endeavor of modern man to adjust to a newly discovered self and world.[1]

Bonhoeffer's criticism of "religious" interpretation of the faith arises precisely because they either diminish God's concern for the world or refuse to recognize Christ's lordship over the world. In other words, the necessity of non-religious interpretation arises for Bonhoeffer precisely out of faith in Jesus Christ. It derives from the very heart of his theology, from his Chritology. The centrality of Christ in Bonhoeffer's theology can clearly be seen in his *Ethics*: "What matters in the church is not religion but the form of Christ, and its taking form amidst a band of men."[2] The problem and necessity of non-religious interpretation he has posed before us by way of introducing a question with which he is struggling: "What *is* bothering me incessantly is the question what Christianity really is, or indeed who Christ really is, for us today."[3] Even the common ways of speaking of Jesus Christ have become for him deeply problematical. "It is only when one knows the unutterability of the name of God that one can utter the name of Jesus Christ."[4]

Bonhoeffer's method of biblical interpretation is clear in his lecture entitled "*Vergegenwärtigung neutestamentlicher Texte*," delivered on August 23, 1935.[1] The term *Vergegenwärtigung* ("re-presentation") in the title is significant here. It stands for the task and process of making the Biblical Word relevant to contemporary man. He wanted to explain the present age in terms of the Bible, and not the Bible in terms of the present age.[2] Bonhoeffer maintained that interpreting the Bible in terms of the present age is to make man the measure of the Gospel rather than to learn from the Gospel the true norm for human existence. According to him, in this lecture, as well as in all the other writings, the norm and standard of all "re-presentation" is Jesus Christ.

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[1] Eberhard Bethge, "Bonhoeffer's Christology and His 'Religionless Christianity'," *Bonhoeffer in a World Come of Age*, ed. by Peter Vorkink, II, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

[2] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

[3] *LPP*, *op. cit.*, p. 279 (30 April 1944).

[4] *LPP*, *op. cit.*, p. 157 (5 December 1943).

Bonhoeffer's Christological interpretation of the Old Testament appears in his lectures delivered in the Winter semester 1932-33 at the University of Berlin.[3] There he says, for example, that God's creation of the world out of nothing is already the Gospel. "From the beginning the world is placed in the sign of the resurrection of Christ from the dead."[4] The Christological references are even more explicit in his Bible study entitled "König David" (1935).[5] He interprets the entire career of David in the light of Christ. Bonhoeffer's two short studies on Psalms also gives us an indication of his Christological interpretation.[1] Here David, who is said to be the author of many Psalms, is described as "a prototype of Jesus Christ."

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[1] Cf. *GS*, *op*. *cit*., Vol. III, pp. 303-24. For an illuminating discussion of Bonhoeffer's use of the Bible, see, Walter Harrelson, "Bonhoeffer and the Bible," *The Place of Bonhoeffer*, ed. by Martin E. Marty (New York: Association Press, 1962), pp. 115-39.

[2] Cf. *GS*, *op*. *cit*., Vol. III, pp. 308f.

[3] Cf. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, *op*. *cit*. This book also includes a Bible study on "Temptation" (trans. by Kathleen Downham) which Bonhoeffer gave on the occasion of the reunion of some clergy, April 12-17, 1937.

[4] Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, *op*. *cit*., p. 19.

[5] Cf. *GS*, *op*. *cit*., Vol. IV, pp. 294-320.

The Song of Songs fascinated Bonhoeffer because of its earthiness, naturalness, and unblushing but nonprurient sensuality. Bonhoeffer sees real significance in its inclusion *in* the Old Testament:

> Even in the Bible we have the Song of Songs; and really one can imagine no more ardent, passionate, sensual love than is portrayed there (see 7.6). It's a good thing that the book is in the Bible, in face of all those who believe that the restraint of passion is Christian (where is there such restraint in the Old Testament?).[2]

The classical interpretation of Song of Songs is to treat it as an allegory of Christ and the church.[3] Bonhoeffer rejects this "spiritualized" treatment in favor of a literal and natural one: "I must say I should prefer to read it as an ordinary love song, and that is probably the best 'Christological' exposition."[4] It is precisely by reading the Song of Songs as a poem about the joys and beauties of earthly love between a man and a woman that we read it Christologically. For Christ is the man at the center of life, the man who exists for others in all the concrete encounters and activities of daily life.

Bonhoeffer's Biblical exegesis in the 1930's raised the question: "What is Christ asking of us today?" In other words, Bonhoeffer was trying to interpret the scripture from the church's point of view. Now, in the prison writings the question takes on a still deeper form: Who is Jesus Christ for the man who can no longer take religion seriously--the man who fully felt the impact of the Marxian and the Darwinian and Freudian revolutions? Who is Christ if the religious premise has to be cut away from the church? Thus, the question is above all a question about Christ, not man. We must apply all our attention to the task, asserts Bonhoeffer, to answer the question "who Christ really is, for us today"--not merely in the traditional, standardized and ineffectual religious terms, but fully, personally, and responsibly. Bonhoeffer's summons for a non-religious interpretation of Biblical and theological concepts is only to see Christ more sharply.

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[1] Cf. Bonhoeffer, *Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible*, trans. by James H. Burtness (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1970); and, Bonhoeffer, "*Christus in den Psalmen*," *GS*, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, pp. 294-302. Two shorter works should also be mentioned in this connection which illustrate Bonhoeffer's interest in Christological interpretation: "Thy Kingdom Come: The Prayer of the Church for God's Kingdom on Earth" (1932) & "The First Table of Ten Commandments" (1944), *Preface to Bonhoeffer*, ed. by John D. Godsey, *op. cit.*

[2] *LPP*, *op. cit.*, p. 303 (20 May 1944).

[3] For a survey of the various traditional and modern interpretations of the Song of Songs, see, Theophile J. Meek, "The Song of Songs: Introduction and Exegesis," *The Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. 5 (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956), pp. 92-96.

[4] *LPP*, *op. cit.*, p. 315 (2 June 1944).

In the outline for the book he intended to write, Bonhoeffer asks a very important question:

> What do we really believe? I mean, believe in such a way that we stake our lives on it? The problem of the Apostles' Creed? 'What _must_ I believe?' is the wrong question.[1]

Bonhoeffer's answer to this question may be a key to his non-religious interpretation. To believe in the church, the word of God, justification, etc., Bonhoeffer says, a man must have brought these mysteries into his life and integrated them into the pattern of his values, commitments and hopes. At the point of integration, justification is no longer a Biblical word, but has a profound personal meaning--a meaning palpable and concrete for that individual. The concrete interpretation and this depth of meaning enables the Biblical concepts to become alive in a world come of age.

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[1] _LPP_, _op_. _cit_., p. 382 ("Outline for a Book").

What is the theological validity of what Bonhoeffer speaks of as non-religious interpretation? Bonhoeffer says:

> The pauline question whether περιτομη [circumcision] is a condition of justification seems to me in present day terms to be whether religion is a condition of salvation. Freedom from περιτομη is also freedom from religion.[1]

Accordingly, the non-religious interpretation of Biblical concepts means that "the concepts must be interpreted in such a way as not to make religion a precondition of faith."[2] Here we find the theological solution of the problem of non-religious interpretation. The analogy with circumcision points to the law; the problem of religion falls under the theological category of law. The relation of religion to Christian faith has to be thought through in the light of the relation of law to Gospel. This is pointed out on another occasion when Bonhoeffer says that to confuse Christ with a particular stage in the "religiousness" of man would be to confuse him with a human law.[3] It is to be carefully noted that the introduction of the concept of law does not imply the identification of religion and law. Direct identification of religion with law would rest on the mistaken notion that non-religiousness is lawlessness, which of course is not what Bonhoeffer means. Gerhard Ebeling clarifies this point in these words:

> The introduction of the concept law implies rather that the phenomenon of religion (and likewise that of non-religiousness!) has its place in theology within the problem of the law--so much so, indeed, that on the basis of the concept religion the correct distinction of law and Gospel is quite out of the question, and thus the domination of the concept religion in theology can only lead to falsely turning the Gospel into law.[4]

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[1] *LPP*, *op*. *cit*., p. 281 (30 April 1944).

[2] *LPP*, *op*. *cit*., p. 329 (8 June 1944).

[3] *LPP*, *op*. *cit*., p. 327 (8 June 1944).

[4] Gerhard Ebeling, *Word and Faith*, trans. by James W. Leitch (London: SCM Press, 1963), p. 142.

In other words we can say that religious interpretation is legalistic interpretation whereas non-religious interpretation means interpretation that distinguishes law and Gospel. Legalistic interpretation can neither be Christological interpretation nor interpretation of faith; on the other hand interpretation that distinguishes law and Gospel can be both Christological interpretation and interpretation of faith.

The question that confronts Bonhoeffer, and us too, is this: how do we preach the Gospel to the non-religious man as freedom from the law without first laying down to him law that is strange to him and does not concern him? How is the law really brought home to the non-religious man? What is it that unconditionally concerns him? Whether our preaching of the Gospel is understandable and binding depends on whether our preaching of the law is understandable and binding. Bonhoeffer said:

> It is only when one loves life and the earth so much that without them everything seems to be over that one may believe in the resurrection and a new world; it is only when one submits to God's law that one may speak of grace; and it is only when God's wrath and vengeance are hanging as grim realities over the heads of one's enemies that something of what it means to love and forgive them can touch our hearts. In my opinion it is not Christian to want to take our thoughts and feelings too quickly and too directly from the New Testament. . . .One cannot and must not speak the last word before the last but one. We live in the last but one and believe the last.[1]

One might well question, at this point, the validity of non-religious interpretation, asking whether Bonhoeffer has given us any example of non-religious interpretation rather than speaking only of its importance. Apparently Bonhoeffer has not left a definite answer to this question, except a handful of random thoughts. He even confessed

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[1] LPP, op. cit., p. 157 (5 December 1943).

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that "I'm only gradually working my way to the non-religious interpretation of biblical concepts; the job is too big for me to finish just yet."[1] Before he could do anything constructively in this line ill-fate took him from us. However, Bonhoeffer gives us the "starting point" for a non-religious interpretation when he directs our view to the God of the Bible. A non-religious interpretation would call men to participate in the suffering of God in the life of the world, "not in the first place thinking about one's own needs, problems, sins, and fears, but allowing oneself to be caught up into the way of Jesus Christ, into the messianic event, thus fulfilling Isa. 53."[2] The problem of a non-religious interpretation is not merely a hermeneutical one, but involves the whole existence of the church itself. It is an interpretation that is not concerned with religion, but with life. It is by living in the midst of the world, by taking life in our stride, that "we throw ourselves completely into the arms of God, taking seriously, not our own sufferings, but those of God in the world--watching with Christ in Gethsemane."[3] Thus Bonhoeffer exhorts us to interpret the Biblical concepts in terms of responsible involvement in life itself.

One thing is quite clear from what Bonhoeffer says: the criterion for the understandability of our preaching should not be how well it is understood by the believer, but by the non-believer. For, though the proclaimed word seeks to effect faith, it does not presuppose faith as a prerequisite. Bonhoeffer's complaint is that today the church has made the congregation's belief, and thereby its faith, the requirement for its understanding of the preaching. "Believe what we tell you," the church seems to say, "have faith, and you will understand," failing to recognize that if her preaching is not understandable it can hardly elicit faith. This reversal of criteria of understandability results not only in making the proclamation as a foreign language to the non-believer, but also in stifling the faith of the believer. Thus we find, heralded in Bonhoeffer's struggle with the question of non-religious interpretation, a rediscovery of what Christian faith really means. He believes that the Bible message, for its own part, ultimately demands a non-religious interpretation, because only such an interpretation is appropriate to it.

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[1] LPP, op. cit., p. 359 (16 July 1944).
[2] LPP, op. cit., pp. 361f (18 July 1944).
[3] LPP, op. cit., p. 370 (21 July 1944).

It is to be said emphatically that Bonhoeffer's non-religious interpretation does not cast aside the importance of prayer, sacraments, etc. Defending Bonhoeffer's position Eberhard Bethge says:

> It would be a great mistake to understand Bonhoeffer as abolishing the worshipping church and replacing service and sacrament by acts of charity. The religionless world in itself is *not* Christianity. The church must not throw away its great terms 'creation', 'fall', 'atonement', 'repentance', 'last things', and so on. But if she cannot relate them to the secularized world in such a way that their essence in worldly life can immediately be seen, then the church had better keep silent. Bonhoeffer himself worshipped and acted vicariously in anonymity and silence, and it is precisely this which enables him to speak loudly now to worldly life.[1]

Again, it is to be emphasized that Bonhoeffer's reflexions on non-religious interpretation presuppose the church's task of proclamation. He speaks of the weakness of the church's proclamation in these words:

> Our church, which has been fighting in these years only for its self-preservation, as though that were an end in itself, is incapable of taking the word

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[1] Eberhard Bethge, "The Challenge of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Life and Theology," *World Come of Age*, ed. by Ronald Gregor Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

> of reconciliation and redemption to mankind and the world.[1]

Thus the church has sinned against its own nature. It has missed the mark in that "The church is the church only when it exists for others."[2] His criticism of the church is an expression of his love for the church, and if we take these words in isolation they will form only a half-truth. As Gerhard Ebeling has pointed out,

> . . . the startling slogan of the non-religious interpretation of biblical concepts can be fruitfully studied only if we neither stare at the expression in anxiety or fascination, nor yet ask impatiently for practical advice on the carrying out of the programme, but let ourselves be guided on to its path--a path that is no paved road but becomes a path as we take our own steps upon it, a path on which we in fact already find ourselves as theologians, yet possibly wandering without sense of direction or idly marking time.[3]

Bonhoeffer leaves the church utterly and completely to the mercy of that which makes the church its true self; therefore his theological thinking, too, is oriented towards that which makes the church its true self--that is the word of God proclaimed. The church which lacks this foundation, Bonhoeffer says, is incapable of taking the word of reconciliation and redemption to mankind and the world. It is this same concern that we find in his challenge to the church:

> The church must come out of its stagnation. We must move out again into the open air of intellectual discussion with the world, and risk saying controversial things, if we are to get down to the serious problems of life.[4]

Marxist interpreters of Bonhoeffer assume that if Bonhoeffer's call for non-religious interpretation is taken seriously, then there is not much left in Christianity except some social teachings.[1] One can hardly agree with this exaggerated judgment. It is rather difficult to believe that Bonhoeffer would have reduced Christianity to some social teachings. On the contrary it was the desire of Bonhoeffer to present to the church a new vision in that he wanted the sacramental church to be also a social church without losing its spiritual foundation. For those who question the authenticity of Bonhoeffer's faith during the prison days, the words of H. Fischer-Hüllstrung, the camp doctor of the Flossenbürg concentration camp, remain a genuine testimony. Describing the early morning hours of the day Bonhoeffer was executed, the doctor wrote:

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[1] LPP, op. cit., p. 300 ("Thoughts on the Day of the Baptism of D. W. R. Bethge").

[2] LPP, op. cit., p. 382 ("Outline for a Book").

[3] Ebeling, op. cit., p. 127.

[4] LPP, op. cit., p. 378 (3 August 1944).

> Through the half-open door in one room of the huts I saw Pastor Bonhoeffer, before taking off his prison garb, kneeling on the floor praying fervently to his God. I was most deeply moved by the way this lovable man prayed, so devout and so certain that God heard his prayer. At the place of execution, he again said a short prayer and then climbed the steps to the gallows, brave and composed. His death ensued after a few seconds. In the almost fifty years that I worked as a doctor, I have hardly ever seen a man die so entirely submissive to the will of God.[2]

One who wants to present Christianity only as some social teachings would not engage in such devotional acts. Rather, what we find here is a supreme illustration of the faith of the one who said: "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die."[3] Nevertheless, Machovec and Ugrinovich are correct in their perceptive observation of finding in Bonhoeffer's theology some possibilities for a constructive encounter between Marxism and Christianity.

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[1] Cf. Milan Machovec, op. cit., p. 148; D. M. Ugrinovich, op. cit., pp. 96f.

[2] H. Fischer-Hüllstrung, "A Report from Flossenbürg," I Knew Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Reminiscences by His Friends, ed. by Wolf-Dieter Zimmermann & Ronald Gregor Smith, trans. by Käthe Gregor Smith (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 232.

[3] Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, op. cit., p. 99.

Bonhoeffer developed his thinking with a firm belief in the Incarnation and the Cross, and consequently, in the potential of a renewed humanity. This belief led him to a wholehearted recognition of the world come of age, to a criticism of religion, and to an attempt to interpret Biblical and theological concepts in a non-religious language. As we found in the preceding chapter, and in the present one too, this process has a strong Christological foundation and it was the genius of Bonhoeffer that he tackled the problem of religion without for a moment losing sight of Christ. It was Bonhoeffer's strong conviction, not only during the University days but also during the prison days, that from Christology alone the non-religious interpretation can receive an answer. Non-religious interpretation is not just an invitation to the self-sufficient world of Marx, but an exhortation to take responsibility of the reality of this world, the norm and standard of which is Jesus Christ himself. It presents to the church solid and dependable criteria for her preaching and true life in the world come of age. By means of non-religious interpretation he hoped to achieve renewal within the church, in her proclamation and in her formal structures. It is certain that with this new kind of interpretation he does not reject the idea of the church; but the way of life in the church which Bonhoeffer envisions is one of what he calls "Religionless Christianity."

CHAPTER VIII

Religionless Christianity

The concept of religionless Christianity has been one of the most controversial subjects in Bonhoeffer's theology. Surprisingly, Bonhoeffer himself used the expression "religionless Christianity" only in the famous letter of April 30, 1944.[1] Mention has already been made that Bonhoeffer's theology, expecially as it was developed in the prison letters, has been under vigorous criticism.[2] It is disappointing to note that many critiques of Bonhoeffer see him only through the eyes of the so-called "radical theologians" who have misrepresented his thoughts. This is not a fair approach to deal with one's thinking. Bonhoeffer should have a hearing on his own merits. If we miss the dialectical nature of his theology we miss the whole point. Paul Lehmann, a good friend of Bonhoeffer during the prewar days, has pointed out that,

> The so-called "Death of God" theologians are perhaps the most conspicuous of Bonhoeffer's misrepresentors. They have seized upon the *Letters and Papers from Prison* with such avid and hasty enthusiasm as to have provided an American parallel to those German enthusiasts who have all but launched a "Bonhoeffer School." On the continent, "the world come of age," "religionless Christianity," "true worldliness" have tempted Bonhoeffer's former pupils, now in theological faculties or church administration, towards cultic passions. In the United States, these same phrases have been appropriated as a kind of quentessential "new essence of Christianity" which claims Bonhoeffer for the tradition of Nietzsche and celebrates him as a forerunner of a theology without God. It cannot be too strongly emphasized that both cultic and atheistic

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[1] *LPP*, *op*. *cit*., p. 280 (30 April 1944).

[2] *Vide supra*, pp. 127ff.

> celebrations of Bonhoeffer are grievous distortions of his thought and spirit. When the prison papers are read and reflected upon, with due regard for Bonhoeffer's exegetical and theological writings, there is no informed and responsible way of claiming Bonhoeffer for a theology without God.[1]

The death-of-God theology, in the narrowest possible sense of the term, points to the teachings of the American triumvirate--Thomas Altizer, William Hamilton and Paul van Buren--who stirred up quite a bit of public commotion, but the value of whose work is now almost dead.[2] These theologians consider Bonhoeffer as the thinker whose seminal thoughts have provided the basic inspiration for their own theological stand. In his book *The New Essence of Christianity*, Hamilton says that "My essay as a whole is deeply indebted to Bonhoeffer, and may be taken as a theological response to the coming of age of the world as he has analyzed it."[3] Hamilton and associates are surely interested in Bonhoeffer, but whether they understand him rightly is a different question. In any case, Bonhoeffer *aficionados* will not subscribe to the theory of making him the *spiritus rector* of the death-of-God theology. It is not our purpose here to interpret the death-of-God theologians but to examine, as briefly as possible, how their theology is basically different from that of Bonhoeffer.

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[1] *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, Vol. XXI, No. 3, 1966, p. 365.

[2] The following four books give some basic idea of the death-of-God theology: Thomas J. J. Altizer, *The Gospel of Christian Atheism* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, MCMLXVI); Thomas J. J. Altizer and William Hamilton, *Radical Theology and the Death of God* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1966); William Hamilton, *The New Essence of Christianity* (New York: Association Press, 1966); and Paul M. van Buren, *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1969). Somewhat more broadly this theology points to such theologians as Gabriel Vahanian (For him, God remains the wholly other, the transcendent one, who can be attained only by faith. He agrees that the death of God is certainly something that has happened, but it has happened in history, to Western culture, and not to God.), Langdon Gilkey, *et. al*. But for our purpose here we need not enter into the intricacies of this controversial subject of placing people in various camps. For an extensive bibliography of the death-of-God theology, see, Glenn R. Wittig, "The Radical Theologians: A Bibliography," *Encounter*, Vol. 27, No. 4, 1966, pp. 299-316.

[3] William Hamilton, *The New Essence of Christianity*, *op. cit.*, p. 12n.

The death-of-God theologians declare that God is dead. When they speak of the death of God they are not just referring to the God of the Greek metaphysics, or the inadequate imagery that has characterized Christian concepts to speak of God, or the false gods of pagan idolatry. They are speaking of the death of the Christian God Himself. They affirm that one must will the Nietzschian observation of the death of God, as the mad man related it in the Gay Science:

> Where is God gone? [the mad man] called out. I mean to tell you! We have killed him,--you and I! We are all his murderers! . . . . Do we not hear the noise of the grave diggers who are burying God? Do we not smell the divine putrefaction?--for even gods putrefy! God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him![1]

There is much dissimilarity in the thoughts of the three theologians we mentioned. Altizer thinks in terms of phenomenological history of religion, seeing man's consciousness developing from an archaic sacred form to a modern secular one. He maintains that the death of God is an historical event. "God has died in our time, in our history, in our existence."[2] It is not clear what the term "God" is intended to designate in this statement, and what is meant by the death of God. Altizer and Hamilton have uncovered at least ten possible meanings for the event of the death of God.[3]

According to Hamilton, the theologian today lives without faith and hope. Only love is left to him. Awareness of the death of God demands, he says, that we imitate Jesus as a model of behaviour, and this means today to devote oneself to love of the neighbour. Hamilton defines Christ neither as a person nor as an object but the "place to be."[1]

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[1] Altizer & Hamilton, Radical Theology and the Death of God, op. cit., pp. 25f.
[2] Ibid., p. 95.
[3] Cf. Ibid., pp. x-xi.

Van Buren uses the techniques of linguistic analysis to discover the rules by which a religious-Christian language may operate without the use of the referent "God." He refuses to recognize objective truth in statements which cannot be empirically verified. According to him the central theological category is imagination. He seeks an answer to the question to what extent religion is an integral part of personal imagination and what importance it has for all aspects of personal life. He comes to the conclusion that talk about God is philosophically meaningless and has no future.

At this point we have to question whether these theologians are authentically "radical." The term "radical" (radix) actually means "pertaining to the roots" or "going to the foundation of something." A Christian theologian, if he is to be radical, should go back to the New Testament roots of Christianity. The death-of-God theologians are not at all radical in this sense, since their starting point would seem to be the rejection of biblical belief in the living, eternal God. They have carried certain tendencies in theology to their own logical conclusions, and it would be more appropriate to say that they are radicals in the jargon where that word means "extremist."[2] Whereas the thrust of Bonhoeffer's theology is his Christocentric concept of reality, it would seem that these self-styled radicals are promoting some kind of "Jesus cult." The title The Christian Century gave to Hamilton's review of van Buren's The Secular Meaning of the Gospel--"There is no God and Jesus is His Son"--rightly points out the paradoxical nature of this strange theology.[1]

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[1] Ibid., p. 92.

[2] Cf. Alan Richardson, "The Death-of-God Theology," Religion in Life, Vol. XXXVI, No. 1, 1967, p. 71.

In contrast to the death-of-God theologians, Bonhoeffer was a radical theologian, for the scripture was the basis of his theology. In *Ethics* Bonhoeffer said:

> In Jesus Christ we have faith in the incarnate, crucified and risen God. In the incarnation we learn of the love of God for His creation; in the crucifixion we learn of the judgment of God upon all flesh; and in the resurrection we learn of God's will for a new world. There could be no greater error than to tear these three elements apart; for each of them comprises the whole.[2]

To interpret this fundamental message of the Gospel to the man come of age was the mission of Bonhoeffer. The expression "death of God" never appears in Bonhoeffer's writings. He speaks, instead, of life "before God" in the world without the God-hypothesis and by means of the "secret discipline" (which Hamilton scarcely mentions and Altizer interprets as a need for silence). It is the "metaphysical" God of religion, the *deus ex machina*, the "working hypothesis," that Bonhoeffer rejects. By the term "God-hypothesis" he means the theism of Western thought, for example that of Descartes. As van Buren writes:

> The God of Descartes . . . was the God who could do anything, literally do anything in or about this world. He was unambiguously omnipotent. He was prime mover, first cause, the ground of all being, and all the rest. If he wanted to make us think that every square had three sides and led us to count the sides in such a way that we came up with four every time, he could do that too. He was the absolute in all its glory, the Supreme Being raised to the *n*th degree.[3]

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[1] *The Christian Century*, Vol. LXXX, No. 40, 1963, p. 1208.

[2] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, *op. cit.*, pp. 130f.

[3] Paul van Buren, "Bonhoeffer's Paradox: Living with God without God," *Bonhoeffer in a World Come of Age*, ed. by Peter Vorkink, II, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

According to Bonhoeffer, to believe in the God of Western theism is to rely upon a false image of God. Therefore he rejects this kind of God-hypothesis. He is very particular to make this rejection, because to him one of the most important aspects of a deeply worldly and committed life is a right theology of God and a clear withdrawal from the false religious outlook of the past.

The crux of the matter for Bonhoeffer lies in the way we recognize our maturity. We do not simply live in the world *etsi deus non daretur*.[1] Rather, we live in this way "before God" (*coram Deo*). It would seem that the death-of-God theologians do not give adequate attention to this affirmative expression--"before God." In one of the most significant of all his remarks Bonhoeffer said:

> . . . we have to live in the world *etsi deus non daretur*. And this is just what we do recognize--before God! God himself compels us to recognize it. So our coming of age leads us to a true recognition of our situation before God. God would have us know that we must live as men who manage our lives without him. The God who is with us is the God who forsakes us (Mark 15:34). The God who lets us live in the world without the working hypothesis of God is the God before whom we stand continually. Before God and with God we live without God.[2]

There are two important points to be noticed in this last statement. First, God is spoken of in conjunction with the "without God." Second, the intellectual honesty of modern man and the testimony of Christian faith meet in a unique way. This means that the world in its adulthood "is now really better understood than it understands itself, namely on the basis of the gospel and in the light of Christ."[3] The meeting of the intellectual honesty of modern man and the testimony of Christian faith is a necessary theological conformation. The faith is a presupposition for the intellectual honesty; for maintaining one's "adulthood" and "standing fast," confronting reality with an intellectually honest view, is possible only "before God." It is evident, then, that Bonhoeffer had no intention of constructing a theology by eliminating the living God of the Bible after the manner of the death-of-God theologians. It would be more appropriate to say that while Altizer, Hamilton and van Buren were concerned about the "death of God," Bonhoeffer took issue with religion.

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[1] In the *LPP*, *etsi deus non daretur* is translated as "even if there were no God" (*op. cit.*, p. 359, 16 July 1944), whereas Bonhoeffer translates it as "*auch wenn es keinen Gott gäbe*" (as though God were not given).

[2] *LPP*, *op. cit.*, p. 360 (16 July 1944).

[3] *LPP*, *op. cit.*, p. 329 (8 June 1944).

It is important to realize that Bonhoeffer's use of the term "religion" takes its origin from Barth's treatment of the subject.[1] He was fully in sympathy with Barth's endeavour to distinguish religion as a human activity from the authentic tidings of the true God. Bonhoeffer also accepted the view that religion as an historical phenomenon was the fruit of human speculation. We have already discussed this in the previous chapter.[2] But there we limited our discussion to Bonhoeffer's criticism of Barth for not having given us concrete guidance on the non-religious interpretation. Here we shall discuss Barth's understanding of "religion," and how Bonhoeffer's treatment of the term "religion" differs from that of Barth.

Barth said that it is only the forgiving and reconciling presence of God in human religion that can give it reality, and that this is to be found only in Jesus Christ, the only mediator between God and man.

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[1] For a discussion of the subject "Bonhoeffer and Barth's 'Positivism of Revelation'," see the following works: Heinrich Ott, Reality and Faith: The Theological Legacy of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, op. cit., pp. 120ff; Regin Prenter, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Karl Barth's Positivism of Revelation," World Come of Age, ed. by Ronald Gregor Smith, op. cit., pp. 93ff; and Robert T. Osborn, "Positivism and Promise in the Theology of Karl Barth," Interpretation, Vol. XXV, No. 3, 1971, pp. 283ff.

[2] Vide supra, pp. 158ff.

He tells us therefore that human religion has no worth nor truth in itself. Since a way has been opened up into the presence of God in and through Christ, all previous religions, or religions outside of Christ, are displaced and robbed of any claim to truth. Justification by grace reveals that religion can be the supreme form taken by human sin. This applies to Christian religion as well. Through sin and self-will the Christian religion may become merely a form of man's cultural self-expression or be the means whereby man seeks to justify and sanctify himself before God. This is the basis of Barth's attack upon nineteenth century religion and upon all self-centered, self-conscious pietistic religion.

Barth, however, does not deny the universality of religion. He emphasizes the need for charity and caution in the evaluation of religion. God speaks through the Christian faith not because of any superiority of Christian religion, but because of His grace. In contrast to revelation, which is God's self-offering and self-manifestation, religion is "a grasping which is not true reception." Barth writes:

> If man tries to grasp at truth of himself, he tries to grasp at it a priori. But in that case he does not do what he has to do when the truth comes to him. He does not believe. If he did, he would listen; but in religion he talks. If he did, he would accept a gift; but in religion he takes something for himself. If he did, he would let God Himself intercede for God: but in religion he ventures to grasp at God.[1]

According to Barth, faith is the response to God's revelation of Himself as Lord in Jesus Christ, a revelation in which the initiative rests firmly with God. If through religion man had been able to find God, this revelation would not have been necessary. The very fact of revelation proves religion to be inadequate, and now the whole field of religion must be looked at in the light of this fact. Barth also says that the theologian's task is to try to discover what the status of religion is from the point of faith.

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[1] Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, op. cit., Vol. I, Part 2, p. 302.

Apart from faith religion becomes idolatry. In a typically lengthy footnote, Barth goes on to describe with great insight how religion is thought of as idolatry in the Bible.[1] Religion is also unbelief because it is man's attempt to find justification and sanctification for himself on his own terms. This is a self-centered way of erecting barriers against God. Our pious efforts to reconcile God to ourselves must certainly be abomination in His sight. Barth makes his position clear in this statement:

> . . . unbelief is always man's faith in himself. And this faith invariably consists in the fact that man makes the mystery of his responsibility his own mystery, instead of accepting it as the mystery of God. It is this faith which is religion. It is contradicted by the revelation attested in the New Testament, which is identical with Jesus Christ as the one who acts for us and on us. This stamps religion as unbelief.[2]

Barth again and again emphasizes that the church exists as the church not insofar as it possesses some inalienable human form but only as it lives by divine grace. Whenever it tries to create an animating principle of its own, the church ceases to be the church of Jesus Christ and becomes an organ of that religion which is the enemy of faith.[3]

Now we turn to Bonhoeffer. He starts, like Barth, from the fundamental principle of justification of the sinner by grace alone. This justification removes from us all false props, all reliance upon external authorities, and all refuge in worldly securities, and throws us not upon ourselves but upon the pure gracious act of God in His unconditional love, so that the ethical and the religious life are lived exclusively with Jesus Christ as the center.

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[1] Cf. Ibid., pp. 303ff.
[2] Ibid., p. 314.
[3] Cf. Ibid., p. 348.

Bonhoeffer, however, differs from Barth when the issue of the religious _a priori_ becomes more pointed. Barth acknowledges man's search for God from below as the height of human endeavor. Although man's reaching out to God, in religion or in philosophy, will not be successful, it still has its place in human achievements. Barth does not deny that man has an inherent tendency for religion. Religion is one rooted in his divine origin in that

> The religious relationship of man to God which is the inevitable consequence of his sin is a degenerate form of the covenant relationship, the relationship between the Creator and the creature. It is the empty and deeply problematical shell of that relationship. But as such it is a confirmation that that relationship has not been destroyed by God, that God will not be mocked, that even forgetful man will not be able to forget Him.[1]

In the midst of all his criticism of religion, Barth still finds religion as an inescapable element in human consciousness. There is an _a priori_ element behind the manifold expression of religion in human history. Barth agrees that this _a priori_ element is not important when it comes to the validity and justification of religion. But Bonhoeffer goes a step further. He denies the religious _a priori_ completely, and it is here that he opens up a new dimension beyond Barth's theology. In contrast to Barth's exclusive emphasis upon revelation, Bonhoeffer brings faith and obedience into focus as the correlatives of revelation. Thus he is able to speak existentially where Barth spoke exclusively in terms of revelation. It is this focus on faith and obedience that enables Bonhoeffer to reject totally that "religion" which Barth mildly distinguishes from revelation.[1]

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[1] Karl Barth, _Church Dogmatics_, _op. cit._, Vol. IV, Part 1, p. 483.

Faith and obedience thus emerge as the important existential motifs of Bonhoeffer's theology, especially in The Cost of Discipleship.[2] By bringing close to faith such a concept as discipleship Bonhoeffer stresses the human side of the event of revelation:

> From the point of view of justification it is necessary . . . to separate them [faith and obedience], but we must never lose sight of their essential unity. For faith is only real when there is obedience, never without it, and faith only becomes faith in the act of obedience.[3]

We cannot make a chronological distinction between faith and obedience, nor determine which is the logical consequence of the other. It is evident from this that Bonhoeffer never denies the theological primacy of revelation.

Faith for Bonhoeffer is not *a priori*, not something always there in man waiting to be discovered: "Faith itself must be created in him."[4] Just as revelation is an event in time and in a concrete situation, faith also is an event that takes place at the critical moment of man's decision. It is true that God's call gives rise to faith, but faith never occurs without man's being responsible for it. Just as revelation is contingent upon God's will, faith is also contingent upon man's responsible decision in response to the call. Bonhoeffer maintains that from the perspective of faith the religious a priori is not merely to be distinguished from faith in a Barthian manner, but rather to be completely rejected. He asks that religious a priori be declared dead. It is not enough to distinguish faith qualitatively from the religious a priori and let the latter remain as an integral part of the human constitution. It must be either faith or religion. This is the reason, Bonhoeffer says, that the religionlessness is hopeful. For Bonhoeffer the affirmation of faith is the negation of religion. Freedom from religion liberates faith to be attentive to the call of God; freedom of faith is the freedom received of God. Quoting Barth, Bonhoeffer effectively asserts that ". . . the relationship between God and man in which God's revelation may truly be imparted to me, a man, must be a free, not a static relationship . . ."[1] Faith is thus rooted in God's freedom.

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[1] Of course, the shift in Barth's thinking cannot be overlooked. Barth has taken into account the charge of exclusive emphasis upon revelation in *Church Dogmatics*, Vols. III/2 and III/4, though he does not mention Bonhoeffer by name.

[2] About this book, Bonhoeffer himself later remarked: "Today I can see the dangers of that book, though I still stand by what I wrote." *LPP*, *op. cit.*, p. 369 (21 July 1944).

[3] Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

[4] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, trans. by Bernard Noble (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), p. 47.

Faith addresses man with an eye to his humanity and has no other aim than that he should be really man. Being a Christian does not add anything to being a man, but puts our humanity into force. "The Christian is not a homo religiosus, but simply a man, as Jesus was a man."[2] The basis of faith is "enduring reality before God." Thus defined faith is concrete and finds worldliness at once both a necessity and a gift.

> [Man] must live a 'secular' life, and thereby share in God's sufferings. He may live a 'secular' life (as one who has been freed from false religious obligations and inhibitions). To be a Christian does not mean to be religious in a particular way, to make something of oneself (a sinner, a penitent, or a saint) on the basis of some method or other, but to be a man - not a type of man, but the man that Christ creates in us.[3]

This is a new thought in Bonhoeffer, whereas he had earlier thought that one can acquire faith by trying to lead some sort of holy life. The following lengthy quote illustrates the point.

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[1] Ibid., p. 81.
[2] LPP, op. cit., p. 369 (21 July 1944).
[3] LPP, op. cit., p. 361 (18 July 1944).

> I remember a conversation that I had in America thirteen years ago with a young French pastor. We were asking ourselves quite simply what we wanted to do with our lives. He said he would like to become a saint (and I think it's quite likely that he did become one). At the time I was very impressed, but I disagreed with him, and said, in effect, that I should like to learn to have faith. For a long time I didn't realize the depth of the contrast. I thought I could acquire faith by trying to live a holy life, or something like it. . . .I discovered later, and I'm still discovering right up to this moment, that it is only by living completely in this world that one learns to have faith. One must completely abandon any attempt to make something of oneself, whether it be a saint, or a converted sinner, or a churchman (a so-called priestly type!), a righteous man or an unrighteous one, a sick man or a healthy one. By this-worldliness I mean living unreservedly in life's duties, problems, successes and failures, experiences and perplexities. In so doing we throw ourselves completely into the arms of God, taking seriously, not our own sufferings, but those of God in the world--watching with Christ in Gethsemane. That, I think, is faith; that is metanoia; and that is how one becomes a man and a Christian.[1]

Thus the enduring of reality makes one a "whole man"--not "man on his own," but "man existing for others." Bonhoeffer's main contention is a triumphant assertion that faith works through love to free the Christian for action in the real world. The man of faith is released from self-preoccupation, on the religious level as well as on other levels, to identify with his neighbour in the day-to-day affairs of the world, the place in which he knows God and enjoys life.

If Bonhoeffer were merely formulating this concept of faith on the basis of premises derived from cultural-historical analysis, he would be indistinguishable from many liberal theologians. For

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[1] LPP, op. cit., pp. 369f (21 July 1944). It is quite conceivable that in this passage Bonhoeffer has in mind Marx's statement: "Es ist leicht, ein Heiliger zu sein, wenn man nicht Mensch sein will" (It is easy to be a saint if one does not wish to be a man). Vide supra, p. 130.

> The weakness of liberal theology was that it conceded to the world the right to determine Christ's place in the world; in the conflict between the church and the world it accepted the comparatively easy terms of peace that the world dictated.[1]

Thus it was Bonhoeffer's conception of faith that enabled and compelled him to take his stand against religion. He was convinced that theology has a message to the world only when it proclaims, from the perspective of faith, the maturity of the world and the religionlessness of man. The world may certainly grow mature, but "the world must be understood better than it understands itself."[2] Bonhoeffer's critique of religion is actually a call to maturity and religionlessness addressed to the contemporary man.

Bonhoeffer's prison letters reveal three themes which are very close to him and which provide a glimpse of what he meant by "religionless Christianity." These themes are "Holy Worldliness," "Theology of Responsibility," and "Secret Dicipline." We have touched on these themes occasionally in the course of our work so far, but now we shall examine them more closely as Bonhoeffer develops them as guidelines for the life style of the "religionless Christian" who believes, in contrast to Marx, that his humanity becomes meaningful only in obedience to his Lord.

1. Holy Worldliness. For Bonhoeffer, holy worldliness is the only genuine form of holiness possible for the comtemporary Christian--anything else is an illusion. He means by this a complete dedication to life, a commitment to one's own potential and to the needs of the world. The idea of holy worldliness can be found early in his thought, in Ethics,

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[1] LPP, op. cit., p. 327 (8 June 1944).
[2] Ibid., p. 328.

where we find the theological presupposition of this concept.

> That God loved the world and reconciled it with Himself in Christ is the central message proclaimed in the New Testament. It is assumed there that the world stands in need of reconciliation with God but that it is not capable of achieving it by itself. The acceptance of the world by God is a miracle of the divine compassion.[1]
> In the body of Jesus Christ God took upon himself the sin of the whole world and bore it. There is no part of the world, be it never so forlorn and never so godless, which is not accepted by God and reconciled with God in Jesus Christ. Whoever sets eyes on the body of Jesus Christ in faith can never again speak of the world as though it were lost, as though it were separated from Christ; he can never again with clerical arrogance set himself apart from the world. The world belongs to Christ, and it is only in Christ that the world is what it is.[2]

In the prison writings we find Bonhoeffer's insistence upon "a full life," the severe criticism of fellow prisoners who "miss the fulness of life and the wholeness of an independent existence," and a constant return to the theme of involvement in the world--these give some indication of the direction in which Bonhoeffer's thoughts move. Dag Hammarskjöld wrote: "In our era, the road to holiness necessarily passes through the world of action."[3] This is precisely what Bonhoeffer means by the term "holy worldliness." He believed that the ability to move freely, amiably, and intensely in the present can only come of a commitment to the future and to the eternal. He described this commitment in the "Stations on the Road to Freedom":

> Faint not nor fear, but go out to the storm and the action,
> trusting in God whose commandment you faithfully follow;
> freedom, exultant, will welcome your spirit with joy.[4]

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[1] Bonhoeffer, Ethics, op. cit., p. 204.

[2] Ibid., p. 205.

[3] Dag Hammarskjöld, Markings, trans. by Leif Sjöberg and W. H. Auden (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1964), p. 122.

[4] LPP, op. cit., p. 371 ("Stations on the Road to Freedom").

Again, in the book he intended to write, the final chapter was to begin:

> The church is the church only when it exists for others. To make a start, it should give away all its property to those in need. The clergy must live solely on the free-will offerings of their congregations, or possibly engage in some secular calling. The church must share in the secular problems of ordinary human life, not dominating but helping and serving. It must tell men of every calling what it means to live in Christ, to exist for others.[1]

Bonhoeffer never equates holy worldliness with any virtue, but with a mind and soul open wide to the world's affairs. Within his notion of holy worldliness, he suggests three qualities which describe the Christian's relationship to God: knowing God in the blessings He sends us; relating to God in strength, and not in weakness; and sharing with God in His suffering in the world. He considers each of these qualities as important characteristics of the Christian, living a holy life before God in the world.

The first quality is that of knowing God in the blessings He sends us. Bonhoeffer says, "The intermediate theological category between God and human fortune is, as far as I can see, that of blessing."[2] God's blessing, whether it be health, fortune, or vigor, forms a central concern in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. Our response to God's blessing is central and crucial: "I believe that we ought so to love and trust God in our lives, and in all the good things that he sends us, that when the time comes (but not before!) we may go to him with love, trust, and joy."[3]

The second quality which Bonhoeffer describes and to which he

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[1] LPP, op. cit., pp. 382f ("Outline for a Book").
[2] LPP, op. cit., p. 374 (28 July 1944).
[3] LPP, op. cit., p. 168 (18 December 1943).

XUM

summons us is that of strength. "I should like to speak of God not on the boundaries but at the centre, not in weaknesses but in strength; and therefore not in death and guilt but in man's life and goodness."[1] God's blessing may well be the source of this strength, but it is man's responsibility to nurture and develop it. On another occasion Bonhoeffer remarks that according to St. Paul, God not only wishes us to be "good," He wishes us also to be strong.[2] Speaking of his cellmate in prison, who used to laugh at others for whining while he himself moaned, Bonhoeffer says:

> I told him in no uncertain terms what I thought of people who can be very hard on others and talk big about a dangerous life and so on, and then collapse under the slightest test of endurance. I told him that it was a downright disgrace, that I had no sympathy at all with anyone like that.[3]

The third quality is that of sharing with God in His suffering in the world. Although God wishes men to love him from the center of their lives, in their joys and blessings, it is also true that he wishes man to remain faithful in suffering. Of this quality Bonhoeffer wrote:

> Not only action, but also suffering is a way to freedom. In suffering, the deliverance consists in our being allowed to put the matter out of our own hands into God's hands. In this sense death is the crowning of human freedom. Whether the human deed is a matter of faith or not depends on whether we understand our suffering as an extension of our action and a completion of freedom.[4]

Bonhoeffer very often uses the phrase "participating in the suffering of God in the world." From the poem "Christians and Pagans" we get the clue of what he means:

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[1] LPP, op. cit., p. 282 (30 April 1944).
[2] Cf. LPP, op. cit., 392 (21 August 1944).
[3] LPP, op. cit., pp. 204f (2 February 1944).
[4] LPP, op. cit., p. 375 (28 July 1944).

> Men go to God when he is sore bestead,
> Find him poor and scorned, without shelter or bread,
> Whelmed under weight of the wicked, the weak, the dead;
> Christians stand by God in his hour of grieving.[1]

This concept of "participating in the suffering of God in the world" is rooted in Bonhoeffer's Christology. Christ did not come in glory and lay claim to a worldly throne. He was born in a stable and died on a cross. For Bonhoeffer it was the suffering and powerlessness of Christ that made God real for him. One can speculate that the whole prison experience was instrumental in making vivid for Bonhoeffer this dimension of the Biblical faith. In that context it was meaningless to think of the "religious" God who solved the unsolved problems. What was meaningful was faith in the God revealed in Christ who was suffering with him in the world.[2] He identifies Christian suffering with his most intense participation in God's life:

> 'Christians stand by God in his hour of grieving'; that is what distinguishes Christians from pagans. Jesus asked in Gethsemane, 'Could you not watch with me one hour?' That is a reversal of what the religious man expects from God. Man is summoned to share in God's suffering at the hands of a godless world.[3]

The radical identification of our suffering the intense life of this world with participation in Christ marks a major tenet of Bonhoeffer's notion of holy worldliness.

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[1] LPP, op. cit., pp. 348f ("Christians and Pagans").

[2] Orthodox theology has always held the view that suffering in the sense of sacrificial self-giving love is of the essence of God. It seems that Bonhoeffer was moving towards a fresh expression of this belief in his presentation of the Christian life as one of self-giving love in the world, and thus conforming to Christ the Crucified One.

[3] LPP, op. cit., p. 361 (18 July 1944).

XUM

2. Theology of Responsibility. Bonhoeffer had already dealt with this theme in an academic way in his Ethics, where he spoke of the structure and pattern of responsibility. Like all of Bonhoeffer's themes, responsibility has a Christological foundation. It is grounded in Jesus Christ's being as being-for-others. It has its foundation "in the responsibility of Jesus Christ for men, on the basis of our knowledge that the origin, essence and goal of all reality is the real, that is to say, God in Jesus Christ."[1] For Bonhoeffer, responsibility is a response to "the reality which is given to us in Jesus Christ."[2] It is fundamentally a matter of deputyship (Stellvertretung).[3] As early as in the doctoral dissertation he asserts that man is not man in and by himself but only in responsibility to and for another.[4] Thus, Bonhoeffer defines responsibility as "the total and realistic response of man to the claim of God and of our neighbour."[5]

It is rather difficult to find an actual definition of responsibility in the prison letters. However, the importance Bonhoeffer placed on responsible action in a Christian's life may be recognized in the following three passages:

> We will not and must not be either outraged critics or opportunists, but must take our share of responsibility for the moulding of history in every situation and at every moment, whether we are the victors or the vanquished. One who will not allow any occurrence whatever to deprive him of responsibility for the course of history--because

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[1] Bonhoeffer, Ethics, op. cit., p. 235.

[2] Ibid., p. 222.

[3] Stellvertretung literally means representation, substitution, or proxy. But Bonhoeffer uses the term in a much deeper sense than what the dictionary meaning suggests. When Bonhoeffer speaks of Stellvertretung, he means the very essence of Christ's being, man's and the church's. Cf. Ibid., pp. 224ff. An example of the concept of Stellvertretung, as Bonhoeffer interpreted it, can be found in the dramatic work, The Deputy, by Rolf Hochhuth, trans. by Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1964).

[4] Cf. Bonhoeffer, The Communion of Saints, op. cit., p. 32.

[5] Bonhoeffer, Ethics, op. cit., p. 245.

> he knows that it has been laid on him by God--will thereafter achieve a more fruitful relation to the events of history than that of barren criticism and equally barren opportunism. To talk of going down fighting like heroes in the face of certain defeat is not really heroic at all, but merely a refusal to face the future. The ultimate question for a responsible man to ask is not how he is to extricate himself heroically from the affair, but how the coming generation is to live.[1]
>
> I believe that God can and will bring good out of evil, even out of the greatest evil. For that purpose he needs men who make the best use of everything. I believe that God will give us all the strength we need to help us to resist in all time of distress. But he never gives it in advance, lest we should rely on ourselves and not on him alone. A faith such as this should allay all our fears for the future. I believe that even our mistakes and shortcomings are turned to good account, and that it is no harder for God to deal with them than with our supposedly good deeds. I believe that God is no timeless fate, but that he waits for and answers sincere prayers and responsible actions.[2]
>
> I think we must rise to the great demands that are made on us personally, and yet at the same time fulfill the commonplace and necessary tasks of daily life. We must confront fate--to me the neuter gender of the word 'fate' (*Schicksal*) is significant--as resolutely as we submit to it at the right time. One can speak of 'guidance' only on the other side of that twofold process, with God meeting us no longer as 'Thou', but also 'disguised' in the 'It'; so in the last resort my question is how we are to find the 'Thou' in this 'It' (i.e. fate), or, in other words, how does 'fate' really become 'guidance'? It's therefore impossible to define the boundary between resistance and submission on the abstract principles; but both of them must exist, and both must be practised. Faith demands this elasticity of behaviour. Only so can we stand our ground in each situation as it arises, and turn it to gain.[3]

As it is clear from these quotes, the question of thought and action has a burning urgency for Bonoheffer. On several occasions Bonhoeffer equates the whole or conformed man with responsible man. In the Baptismal sermon he wrote:

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[1] *LPP*, *op*. *cit*., p. 7 ("After Ten Years").

[2] *Ibid*., p. 11.

[3] *LPP*, *op*. *cit*., pp. 217f (21 February 1944). The phrase "resistance and submission" in this passage is important. The dialectics of resistence and submission carries both Bonhoeffer's picture of the Christian life and his own living of it. As Heinrich Ott suggests, this phrase may have given Bethge the original title of *LPP*: *Widerstand und Ergebung* (Cf. Ott, *Reality and Faith*, *op*. *cit*., p. 251).

> For you thought and action will enter on a new relationship; your thinking will be confined to your responsibilities in action. With us thought was often the luxury of the onlooker; with you it will be entirely subordinated to action. 'Not every one who says to me "Lord, Lord", shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven', said Jesus (Matt. 7:21).[1]

Like holy worldliness, responsibility characterizes the Christian church which has torn out its religious roots.

Bonhoeffer interprets reality by means of his theology of responsibility. Bonhoeffer would agree with Marx in saying that the real is the place of one's responsibility--there is no other place.[2] Apart from the intervention of responsibility, the real is mere illusion: ". . . action comes, not from thought, but from a readiness for responsibility."[3] To be responsible means to answer to someone for something. But, in contrast to Marx, for Bonhoeffer this means answering to God for the real. The place for one's responsibility is precisely the place where one is ontologically rooted in the real. And yet, one's responsibility for the real is not to the real itself, as Marx would have it, but to God in one's personal relation to Him. This is the meaning of "deputyship" which he elaborates in Ethics.

Bonhoeffer believes that only by being responsible to God can we be responsible for the real in all its profundity and fullness. He would agree with Marx that to be responsible to God without at the same time being responsible for the real means alienation. But at the same time he corrects Marx when he says that the real is not self-posited and self-explanatory--Jesus Christ is the reality. Without conforming to that reality, responsibility is a Sisyphean endeavor.

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[1] LPP, op. cit., p. 298 ("Thoughts on the Day of the Baptism of D. W. R. Bethge").
[2] Vide Supra, pp. 42f.
[3] LPP, op. cit., p. 298 ("Thoughts on the Day of the Baptism of D. W. R. Bethge").

3. Secret Discipline. Bethge has pointed out that though the phrase "secret discipline" occurs only twice in the prison letters, it was not as peripheral for Bonhoeffer as the infrequency of the phrase might suggest.[1] It will be appropriate to say that as a means of describing holy worldliness and responsible action, Bonhoeffer chose the unusual phrase "secret discipline." It appears for the first time in the famous letter of April 30, 1944:

> . . . Christ is no longer an object of religion, but something quite different, really the Lord of the world. But what does that mean? What is the place of worship and prayer on a religionless situation? Does the secret discipline [Arkandisziplin] , or alternatively the difference . . . between penultimate and ultimate, take on a new importance here?[2]

Then, following his criticism of Barth's positivistic doctrine of revelation, Bonhoeffer says:

> There are degrees of knowledge and degrees of significance; that means that a secret discipline [Arkandisziplin] must be restored whereby the mysteries of the Christian faith are protected against profanation.[3]

In contrast to the visible, worldly life of the Christian in the realm of the "things before last" (penultimate), there must be a hidden, disciplined life of devotion and prayer that is grounded in the belief on the "last things" (ultimate). These form the dialectical poles of Christian existence--the worldly life always requiring the nourishment of the secret discipline and the secret discipline always sending a man back into the world. Thus the identification of the Christian with the world is not at all to be associated with the loss of his identity. The dialectic between identity and identification of the Christian is the underlining thought behind the phrase "secret discipline." As Bethge put it, "If . . . non-religious interpretation means identification [with the world], then arcane discipline is the guarantee of an identity."[1]

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[1] Cf. Bethge, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, op. cit., p. 784.
[2] LPP, op. cit., p. 281 (30 April 1944).
[3] LPP, op. cit., p. 286 (5 May 1944).

The profound meaning implied in the phrase "secret discipline" can be better understood in the light of The Cost of Discipleship. The book may sound as if it emphasizes the Christian's separation from the world; but it never leads to the point of any lack of responsibility to it. As we make a survey of the whole book we find two major tensions which can be considered as an interpretation of the term "secret discipline."

The first tension is that of the problem of the Christian in the world. There are statements which show a negative approach to the world:

> The world is growing too small for the Christian community, and all it looks for is the Lord's return. It still walks in the flesh, but with eyes upturned to heaven, whence he for whom they wait will come again.[2]

At the same time there are also statements like, "The only way to follow Jesus was by living in the world."[3] The Christian has to lead the life in terms of his secular calling--an idea Bonhoeffer takes from Luther's notion of vocation. Envisaging the confusion this tension might create, Bonhoeffer gives an interpretation to it:

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[1] Bethge, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, op. cit., p. 783.

[2] Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, op. cit., p. 303.

[3] Ibid., p. 51.

> We must face up to the truth that the call of Christ does set up a barrier between man and his natural life. But this barrier is no surely contempt for life, no legalistic piety, it is the life which is life indeed, the gospel, the person of Jesus Christ.[1]

The second tension is the inherent conflict of the hidden yet visible character of Christian life. Jesus Christ said: "Let your light so shine before men."[2] In the following chapter we read: "Go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret."[3] Here also Bonhoeffer offers his interpretation:

> Our activity must be visible, but never be done for the sake of making it visible. . . .That which is visible must also be hidden. The awareness on which Jesus insists is intended to prevent us from reflecting on our extra ordinary position. We have to take heed that we do not take heed of our own righteousness. Otherwise the "extraordinary" which we achieve will not be that which comes from following Christ, but that which springs from our own will and desire.[4]

Secret discipline does not divide life into compartments, either metaphysical or inward. It maintains relationship with God while disengaging mankind from the falsely supernatural character that often marks such a relationship. Secret discipline is not just a diplomatic strategy to deal with the world come of age, but a costly discipline. Its ultimate assurance is that in Jesus Christ on the cross, God and reality form a unity that is indivisible. As André Dumas points out,

> The secret discipline is . . . a reminder that man following after Christ is subject to the whole of reality, and cannot be content with only a portion of

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[1] Ibid., p. 106.
[2] Matthew 5:16.
[3] Matthew 6:6.
[4] Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, op. cit., pp. 175f.

> the world around him that has become tolerable and manipulable under his direction. To have come of age, to be religionless, implies this secret discipline of struggle, which for the Christian is the very secret that God shares with man.[1]

Those who attack Bonhoeffer criticizing that his faith was perverted during his last days should remember these words which reflect his secret discipline:

> . . . even if we are prevented from clarifying our minds by talking things over, we can still pray, and it is only in the spirit of prayer that any such work [intellectual discussion with the world and risk saying controversial things] can be begun and carried through.[2]

The importance Bonhoeffer placed on worship and prayer can be better understood in the context of the first instance where he speaks of the secret discipline. There he asks the question: "What is the place of worship and prayer in a religionless situation?"[3] The question may sound paradoxical, for we consider worship and prayer the most important activities that distinguishes a religious person from a non-religious one. Here we have to remember one criticism Bonhoeffer makes of religion. He says religion relates to one department of life only, one which is in contrast to the world. It is a particular area of experience or activity into which a man may turn aside. It is this assumption against which Bonhoeffer poses aforesaid question. However, this does not mean that Bonhoeffer does not want any one to go to church or to say prayers. He wrote from the prison:

> I've often found it a great help to think in the evening of all those who I know are praying for me, children as well as grown-ups. I think I owe it to

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[1] André Dumas, Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Theologian of Reality, op. cit., p. 201.
[2] LPP, op. cit., p. 379 (3 August 1944).
[3] LPP, op. cit., p. 281 (30 April 1944).

> the prayers of others, both known and unknown, that I have often been kept in safety.[1]

J. A. T. Robinson summarizes Bonhoeffer's thoughts on this question with these words:

> The purpose of worship is not to retire from the secular into the department of the religious, let alone to escape from 'this world' into 'the other world', but to open oneself to the meeting of the Christ in the common, to that which has the power to penetrate its superficiality and redeem it from its alienation. The function of worship is to make us more sensitive to these depths; to focus, sharpen and deepen our response to the world and to other people beyond the point of proximate concern (of liking, self-interest, limited commitment, etc.) to that of ultimate concern; to purify and correct our loves in the light of Christ's love; and in him to find the grace and power to be the reconciled and reconciling community. Anything that achieves this or assists towards it is Christian worship. Anything that fails to do this is not Christian worship, be it ever so 'religious'.[2]

It was acts of devotion that pushed Bonhoeffer into the world. He was a worldly man, but radically Biblical about his worldliness. Bonhoeffer was right in his assessment of the direction in which the Christian must move. Unless the Christian has the secret discipline as a presupposition of his holy worldliness and responsible action, any distinction between being in the world and being of the world disappears.

How is the coming generation to live? Bonhoeffer's critique of religion and the search for a new pattern of Christianity arise from this question. The phrase "religionless Christianity," which Bonhoeffer uses with much caution, may sound misleading. But, as it was said earlier, Bonhoeffer does not reject the idea of church. He finds value in the church, but at the same time calls for a radical reform. In other words, the concept of religionless Christianity is to be taken as a challenge to the renewal of the church, a challenge found again and again in Bonhoeffer's last writings. In this regard, he has not moved far from the position he had taken in *Sanctorum Communio*. For him, religionless Christianity was not just a field of theological exploration, but the concern of his lifelong efforts. He put this concept before the church as a challenge that the church enter into the world with more vigor than she ever has before. We shall conclude the discussion of religionless Christianity with these words of John A. Phillips, which echo the challenge of Bonhoeffer:

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[1] LPP, op. cit., p. 392 (21 August 1944). Also see, his little book Life Together (op. cit.). Here he emphasizes the importance of prayer, thanksgiving, scripture reading, meditation, sacraments and work in a Christian's life.

[2] J. A. T. Robinson, Honest to God (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963), pp. 87f.

> 'Religionless Christianity' . . . is Christianity which has had the proper meaning of transcendence and witness to the Transcendent restored to it. It does not turn man's back upon his life in the world and his face towards God, but rather directs him towards God and the world at one and the same time. God, the Transcendent, is active in this world. Therefore the Christian can and may and must live in this world and, by doing so, bear witness God in this world.[1]

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[1] John A. Phillips, *The Form of Christ in the World*, *op. cit.*, p. 189. The American edition of this book has the title *Christ for Us in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967). The pagination of both editions is identical.

XUM

CHAPTER IX

Transcendence According to Bonhoeffer

Earlier we found that the primary aim of Marx's critique of religion and his atheistic position was the realization of the positive factor of transcendence in Marxism. Marx maintained that in religion the content of transcendence is God, and the transcendent future is the power of God which comes to humanity and evokes a response. But Marx denied any sort of superhuman transcendence. He was reluctant to identify transcendence with God because he understood the absoluteness of God to function as a limit, a restraint upon the otherwise unlimited field of human possibilities. Marx held the view that dependence on a transcendent God and full human autonomy are incompatible. In contrast to religious understanding of transcendence, Marx asserted that man shapes the universe and his own destiny, and thus man is not any more the object of history but its subject and agent. The future to which man is moving is completely open to him. It is this possibility which enables man to move towards the future along an original road that entails freedom and choice that Marx calls transcendence.[1]

The problem of transcendence has been one of the most critical issues in Christian theology. Traditionally transcendence and immanence have been viewed diametrically opposed to each other, perhaps with an undue emphasis on their incompatibility. The former was taken to express God's otherness and distinctness from man, the latter his presence with and freedom for man.[1] These ideas have commonly been expressed, especially in much of medieval theology, in spatial language, though medieval thinkers insisted that the spatial language was only analogous or metaphorical speech when referring to God's presence. One of the rather obvious and unfortunate features of the history of theology has been the tendency to go to extremes in stressing either the immanence of God at the expence of His transcendence, or *vice versa*. If the nineteenth century liberal theologians concentrated on immanentism, the neo-orthodox theologians of twentieth century so stressed God's sovereign transcendence that any sense of His presence in the world was almost lost.[2] The problem of transcendence remains *casus belli* in Christian theology even today.

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[1] Vide supra, pp. 93ff.

The interest in understanding and interpreting transcendence is found not only among Marxist philosophers and Christian theologians, but also in other intellectual communities. Culture analysts, psychologists, sociologists, and others who probe the content and the dimension of human society have worked diligently to define the concept of transcendence.[3] According to them, transcendence aims at total life fulfillment.

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[1] It is to be noted here that the two terms "transcendence" and "immanence" and two other terms often used in the same context--"supernatural" and "natural"--are not to be found anywhere in the Bible, though many passages could be cited as illustrating what these terms mean.

[2] The stress on transcendence among neo-orthodox theologians is not without justification. Theologians like Karl Barth emphasized transcendence in order to warn the church in a moment of crisis of the dangers of immanentism. Barth, however, has corrected this emphasis especially in his book, *The Humanity of God* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1974). Barth's position is that the transcendent God has drawn near to us in Christ, and this gives us the right to speak about Him.

[3] See, for example, Charles A. Reich, *The Greening of America* (New York: Random House, 1970); and, Carl G. Jung, *Psychology and Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950).

They acknowledge that human life is not all that it can be, and they attempt to devise ways to bring about total human fulfillment, using the categories appropriate to their individual scientific discipline. Transcendence means therefore the concrete resolution of social, economic, and political problems as well as spiritual and psychic wholeness. Thus the desire for wholeness is understood as a basic human characteristic.

Whatever may be the definition of transcendence given by these secular thinkers, the objective is the same: to bring into being that which the human condition demands, i.e., the prefection of being. And it is more or less the same objective which contemporary theologians intend with their affirmations about the being of God and the nature of His activity in human history. When contemporary theologians speak of transcendence, their language is very much analogous to that of the humanists and other secular thinkers referred to--though it is not quite the same. They approach the problem of transcendence in various ways: to reform the doctrine of God, to announce His death, to reduce theology to anthropology, or even to accept a pluralism of theistic and non-theistic beliefs in the church.[1]

Generally speaking, the quest for the understanding of transcendence demonstrates that the critical issue for theologians is not to attempt a description of the nature and being of God but instead

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[1] The following works will provide helpful hints in understanding the direction in which contemporary debate on transcendence is moving: David Cairns, *God Up There? A Study in Divine Transcendence* (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1967); Edward Farley, *The Transcendence of God: A Study in Contemporary Philosophical Theology* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, MCMLVII); Langdon Gilkey, *Naming the Whirlwind: The Renewal of God-Language* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1969); William A. Johnson, *The Search for Transcendence: A Theological Analysis of Nontheological Attempts to Define Transcendence* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1974); Alistair Kee, *The Way of Transcendence: Christian Faith Without Belief* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1971); and, *Transcendence*, ed. by Herbert W. Richardson & Donald R. Cutler (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969).

XUM

to attempt an exposition of the consequence of God's activity in human history. In other words, when theologians affirm faith in the transcendent God of the scripture, they are affirming faith in the God who has acted in human history to make man whole and to redeem him from his sins. Transcendence is not just the description of the inner metaphysical being of God. Rather it refers to an event, that historical event witnessed to in the scriptures, which brings about the restoration of health, i.e., reconciliation, to humanity. As William Johnson suggests, "transcendence has little to do with the nature and attributes of God but has everything to do with the consequence of God's activity in history, that is, to introduce a transcendent dimension to human life."[1]

Having looked at the understanding of transcendence in the thoughts of secular thinkers and contemporary theologians, we shall now examine Bonhoeffer's own treatment of the subject. For Bonhoeffer, the perfection of being is achieved through the transformation of human life by the redemptive activity of the transcendent God, who identified himself with man in order to effect wholeness. He offers a view of transcendence which is not identical with a particular metaphysic, but which leaves man in free play within the reality of his historical existence. It is crucial to his thinking that the unbridgeable gap between the transcendent God and the created order is bridged by the incarnation. Neither announcing the death of God nor reducing theology to anthropology, Bonhoeffer is trying to protect a very specific and concrete understanding of the incarnation from either dualism or immanentism, so that Christ may be known as the present Christ who assures God's presence to reality and reality's presence before God. He interprets transcendence in terms of human sociality. For Bonhoeffer, the other man, as an ethical subject in community, is the form of both the otherness and the presence of God. The Christian God is He who is other in His being-for and being-with man.

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[1] William A. Johnson, The Search for Transcendence, op. cit., p. 151.

André Dumas has pointed out that "Transcendence runs the risk of exiling God outside of reality, and of debasing the worth of creation as a second-rate imitation of the true realm of essences."[1] By the use of the concept of "this-worldly transcendence" Bonhoeffer avoids this risk. He speaks of God not above reality, but at the point of hidden presence in reality. The incarnation is the one place where the Christian can understand God's transcendence. As a result transcendence does not create a division between earthly appearences and heavenly essences. As Martin Marty remarked,

> This ability to see the safeguarding of God's transcendence while asserting that it is *this* world that God creates, in which He is Incarnate, Crucified, Resurrected--in other words, to reject angelism and all theologies of pure transcendence or revelatory illusion--may be [Bonhoeffer's] enduring contribution to theological thought in our own time.[2]

Bonhoeffer reformulated the concept of transcendence in such a way that he rejected the doctrine of God popularly associated with much of the history of theology and replaced it with an understanding of transcendence which is focused upon the humanity of Christ and the participation of the disciple, through Him, in the life of the world come of age. Bonhoeffer, thus, responds to Marx that faith in the transcendent God is not a fleeing away from the affairs of this world, on the contrary

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[1] André Dumas, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Theologian of Reality*, *op. cit.*, p. 116.
[2] *The Place of Bonhoeffer*, ed. by Martin Marty, *op. cit.*, pp. 13f.

XUM

it is taking full responsibility of the reality of this world.

We shall now see how Bonhoeffer spoke of the transcendence of God as he expounded it in his Christology. According to Bonhoeffer, Christology is utterly concrete in its orientation. In _Christ the Center_ Bonhoeffer asserts that

> God in timeless eternity is not God, Jesus limited by time is not Jesus. Rather, God is God in the man Jesus. In this Jesus Christ God is present. This one God-man is the starting point of christology.[1]

For Bonhoeffer, Christology is a doctrine of God as well as of the humanity of Jesus, for Jesus Christ is God present in the humanity of Jesus. He expresses the difference between transcendence and immanence in terms of the two questions he introduces in his Christology lectures:

> The question 'Who?' is the question of transcendence. The question 'How?' is the question of immanence. Because the one who is questioned here is the Son, the immanent question cannot grasp him. Not, 'How are you possible?'--that is the godless question, the serpent's question--but 'Who are you?' The question 'Who?' expresses the strangeness and otherness of the encounter and at the same time reveals itself as the question of the very existence of the enquirer himself. He enquires about the being which is alien to his own being, about the boundaries of his own existence. Transcendence puts his own being in question. With the answer that his Logos has found its limit man comes up against the boundaries of his existence. So the question of transcendence is the question of existence and the question of existence is the question of transcendence. In theological terms: man only knows who he is in the

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[1] Bonhoeffer, _Christ the Center_, introduced by E. H. Robertson, trans. by John Bowden (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 46. The content of this book is lectures given by Bonhoeffer at the University of Berlin during the summer semester of 1933. Bonhoeffer's original notes are lost. Eberhard Bethge reconstructed these lectures from notes taken and preserved by several students, and we have it now in book form. Although there is some lack of clarity in the book (mainly because it is a reconstructed work), "the substantial authenticity of Bonhoeffer's _Christologie_ is attested to both by the testimony of those who heard the lectures and by a comparison of the _Christologie_ with other writings whose authenticity is incontestable." Cf. Jaroslav Pelikan, "Bonhoeffer's _Christologie_ of 1933," _The Place of Bonhoeffer_, ed. by Martin Marty, _op. cit._, p. 147.

> light of God.[1]

Traditionally Christology has wrongly phrased the question of the incarnation as the question of how to bring together an eternal, infinite God and the temporal, finite man Jesus. With Bonhoeffer's concrete biblical-theological question "Who?"

> . . . the whole problem of christology is shifted. For here the point at issue is not the relationship of an isolated God to an isolated man in Christ, but the relationship of the already given God-man to the likeness of man. This God-man Jesus Christ is present and contemporaneous in the form of the 'likeness', i.e., in veiled form, as a stumbling block (*scandalon*).[2]

When we restrict ourselves to the biblical-theological question "Who?" and look only to the scriptures for the answer we discover that

> Christ is Christ not as Christ in himself, but in his relation to me. His being Christ is his being *pro me*. This being *pro me* is in turn not meant to be understood as an effect which emanates from him, or as an accident; it is meant to be understood as the essence, as the being of the person himself. This personal nucleus itself is the *pro me*. That Christ is *pro me* is not an historical or an ontical statement, but an ontological one. That is, Christ can never be thought of in his being in himself, but only in his relationship to me. That in turn means that Christ can only be conceived of existentially, viz. in the community.[3]

Here we have the essence of Bonhoeffer's Christology that the very being of Christ is his being-for-man, in the community. This passage is highly significant, for here we find a Christological idea which is similar to the "religionless" Christology of the prison letters: the very being of Christ is his "being there for other." We will discuss this point later. But at present we shall return to the question "Who?"

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[1] *Ibid*., pp. 30f.
[2] *Ibid*., p. 46.
[3] *Ibid*., p. 47.

Epistemology and metaphysics ask the question "How?" But that is the question of immanence, about relations among phenomena. Only Christology legitimately asks the question about transcendence, because it asks the person-question "Who?" But within the structure of "Who?" there is also the question of "Where?"

> 'Where does he stand?' He stands _pro_ _me_. He stands in my place, where I should stand and cannot. He stands on the boundary of my existence, beyond my existence, but still for me. This expresses the fact that I am separated from the 'I' that I should be by a boundary which I am unable to cross. This boundary lies between me and myself, between the old 'I' and the new 'I'. . . . At this place I cannot stand alone. Here Christ stands, in the centre, between me and myself, between the old existence and the new. So Christ is at the same time my own boundary and my rediscovered centre, the centre lying both between 'I' and 'I' and between 'I' and God. . . . If we turn the question 'Where?' back into the question 'Who?', the answer is, Christ is the mediator as the one who is there _pro_ _me_.[1]

It is in the light of this answer to the question "Where?" that Bonhoeffer's _pro_ _me_ statement which we quoted earlier is to be understood.

Bonhoeffer follows Luther in his conviction that God is hidden not only generally, but even in the cross of Christ which represents God's _opus_ _alienum_, i.e., His judgment, His wrath.[2] But hidden behind this alien work God works out His proper work (_opus_ _proprium_), i.e., salvation of the sinner, justification of the impious. Another conviction of Luther is the existential dimension of the redemptive events. More precisely, the events of cross and resurrection are of salvific significance if understood as events _pro_ _me_ or _pro_ _nobis_. Unless I grasp that Christ died for me and was raised for me, his death and resurrection are of no avail. Bonhoeffer used this Lutheran principle as his major Christological axiom: "A Christology which does not put at the beginning the statement, 'God is only God *pro me*, Christ is only Christ *pro me*,' condemns itself."[1] Here Bonhoeffer refers to the essential unity of act and being in God and in Christ. If God were not *pro me* He would not have acted in terms of revelation and made Himself known to us in Jesus Christ. If Jesus Christ were not *pro me* He would not be God incarnate. This means that Christ cannot be thought of in isolation, as a Christ in Himself, but only in his relation to us, because the purpose of God's humbling Himself in Christ was to have this relation to us, to be *pro me*. This does not, however, mean that God and Christ depend for their existence on me. Bonhoeffer makes it clear when he says that Christ is both "the one who has really bound himself to me in free existence," and "the one who has freely preserved his contingency in his 'being-there for you'."[2]

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[1] _Ibid_., pp. 61f.

[2] For a discussion of Luther's concepts of _deus_ _absconditus_ and _deus_ _revelatus_, see, John Dillenberger, _God Hidden and Revealed: The Interpretation of Luther's deus absconditus and its Significance for Religious Thought_ (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1953).

In Bonhoeffer's Christology lectures, one point clearly stands out: only a person can be authentically transcendent to me. Transcendence, thus, is a personal-ethical, not an epistemological, concept. This emphasis on the personal ethical aspect of transcendence is not new in Bonhoeffer's thinking. From the very beginning of his theological career, Bonhoeffer interpreted transcendence in socio-ethical terms. His notion of transcendence, together with the concept of person, was introduced for the first time in *Sanctorum Communio*. There we find the pregnant thought which prefigures Bonhoeffer's later Christological usage of these terms:

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[1] *Ibid.*, p. 48.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 48.

> . . . the concepts of person, community and God have an essential and indissoluble relation to one another. It is in relation to persons and personal community that the concept of God is formed. In principle, the nature of the Christian concept of community can be reached as well from the concept of God as from the concept of person.[1]

The question "Who is Christ for us today?" which we find in the prison letters can be traced back to a statement Bonhoeffer made as early as 1929 when he wrote the *Habilitationsschrift*. There he says:

> In faith Christ is the creator of my new personal being and at the same time the Lord "with reference to" which--εις-αυτον--the person is created; thus existence is determined both prospectively and retrospectively in relation to transcendence: it "is" between transcendent poles. In the act of belief, which Christ himself creates within me, inasmuch as he gives me the Holy Spirit who hears and believes within me, he also proves himself the free Lord of my existence. Christ "is" only "in" faith, yet he is master of my faith. He is the absolute extrinsicality for my existence, but for that very reason he impinges on it, gives himself to be known by it.[2]

In an early article written while he was in the United States, Bonhoeffer spoke of Christ as "the personal revelation, the personal presence of God in the world."[3] Again, in the same article, he brought together the three important conceptions--person, transcendence and God:

> The transcendence of God does not mean anything else than that God is personality, provided there is an adequate understanding of the concept of personality. . . . For Christian thought, personality is the last limit of thinking and the ultimate reality. Only personality can limit me, because the other personality has its own demands and claims, its own law and will, which are different from mine and which I cannot overcome as such. Personality is free and does not enter the general laws of my thinking. God as the absolutely free personality is therefore absolutely transcendent. . . . Where can I find his

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[1] Bonhoeffer, *The Communion of Saints*, *op. cit.*, p. 22. See also, pp. 33 and 127-30.

[2] Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, trans. by Bernard Noble (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), p. 141.

[3] Bonhoeffer, "Concerning the Christian Idea of God," *GS*, Vol. III, p. 104.

XUM

> inaccessible reality which is so entirely hidden from my thinking? How do I know about his being the absolutely transcendent personality? The answer is given and must be given by God himself, in his own word in Jesus Christ, for no one can answer this question except God himself, in his self-revelation in history, since none can speak the truth except God.[1]

In the exgetical work Creation and Fall Bonhoeffer states that "'Jesus Christ' is the name of God. This is highly anthropomorphic and highly objective at the same time."[2] Thus we find that the social formulation of transcendence in terms of Jesus' "being there for others," so characteristic of prison letters, is a strong echo of Bonhoeffer's early writings.

In the prison writings Bonhoeffer interpreted God's transcendence in concrete, social, ethical I-Thou terms. He believed that whatever is to be said of God's transcendence is what we can say of the biblical Christ. This man provides us with a norm which is concrete and ethical. In Ethics, Bonhoeffer says that it is to Christ, and Christ alone, that we look to see God. Any apprehension of the "beyond" of God is an apprehension of the "beyond" which we see manifested in the man Jesus. Christ means that God is to be found in the midst of the world and nowhere else. When we see the man Jesus we see both God and the world and thus we understand that for us there is no "God" on the one hand and the "world" on the other, but only God-in-the-world.

> There is no man 'in himself', just as there is no God 'in Himself'; both of these are empty abstractions. Man is the man who was accepted in the incarnation of Christ, who was loved, condemned and reconciled in Christ; and God is God become man [der Menschgewordene].[3]

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[1] Ibid., pp. 103f.

[2] Bonhoeffer, Creation and Fall, op. cit., p. 45.

[3] Bonhoeffer, Ethics, op. cit., p. 221.

Because Bonhoeffer understands the world only in the light of its reconciliation in Christ he can speak only of a "this-worldly transcendence." "It is now essential to the real concept of the secular that it shall always be seen in the movement of being accepted and becoming accepted by God in Christ."[1] The transcendence of God is to be understood by Bonhoeffer's lifelong and characteristic metaphor "God at the center of life." The "beyond" of God is not only God-*in*-the-world revealed in Jesus; it is God-*and*-the-world reconciled in Jesus. In Christ we not only see God in the center of life; we also see God as the reconciler of life. Divine transcendence is revealed in Christ, and it is revealed as reconciliation. The "beyond" (*Jenseits*) of God is reconciliation at the center of life. In discussing the transcendence of God Bonhoeffer totally rejects the attempt to posit God as a metaphysical being beyond time and space, a working hypothesis, a *deus ex machina*.[2] He goes on explicitly to disavow metaphysical transcendence: "The transcendence of epistemological theory has nothing to do with the transcendence of God."[3] In the same context he again says: "I should like to speak of God not on the boundaries but at the centre, not in weaknesses but in strength; and therefore not in death and guilt but in man's life and goodness."[4] The God of the Bible encounters man in the midst of his worldly activities, at his strongest point. Bonhoeffer, thus, brought to his "non-religious" project a resolutely non-metaphysical notion of divine transcendence.

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[1] *Ibid*., p. 198.
[2] *Vide supra*, pp. 152ff.
[3] *LPP*, *op. cit*., p. 282 (30 April 1944).
[4] *Ibid*.

God's transcendence in the realm of knowledge is the "beyond" (*Jenseits*) in what man knows, not the stopgap in what he does not know. Bonhoeffer emphasizes this strongly when he speaks of Christ that "he certainly didn't 'come' to answer our unsolved problems.[1] The "beyond" of god is not to be understood as metaphysical transcendence. The God who is to be understood in the man Jesus is "at the center of life." As Bonhoeffer states it in epigrammatic form, "The beyond [*Das Jenseitige*] is not what is infinitely remote, but what is nearest at hand."[2]

Bonhoeffer's attempt to interpret the transcendence of God in a "non-religious" way reaches its climax in his "Outline for a Book." There he asks the question, "Who is God?" and answers,

> Encounter with Jesus Christ. The experience that a transformation of all human life is given in the fact that 'Jesus is there only for others' [*für andere da ist*]. His 'being there for others' is the experience of transcendence [Das "Für-andere-da-sein" Jesu ist die Transzendenzerfahrung].[3]

All that we know of God is the "being there for others" which characterizes the Jesus of the Gospels. This "non-religious" concept of Jesus as "the man for others" is certainly not a humanist or ethical reductionism. Rather, it is an interpretation of God's transcendence in terms of the proclamation that Jesus is the Christ. In other words, the transcendent is met in the concern for others as given to us in the life and way of Jesus. This new understanding of transcendence has serious implications to our faith. God is not to be found in an abstract belief about His omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence. Feuerbach and Marx criticized that God is a projection of man's ideals. As long as we place some abstract ideas in place of God their criticism holds true. God is not the idea we have of Him. Rather, we find the ground of God's omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence in Jesus' "being there for others."

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[1] *LPP*, *op*. *cit*., p. 312 (29 May 1944).
[2] *LPP*, *op*. *cit*., p. 376 ("Miscellaneous Thoughts").
[3] *LPP*, *op*. *cit*., p. 381 ("Outline for a Book").

Faith, Bonhoeffer says, is participation in Jesus' freedom to be for others. For Bonhoeffer, freedom is the distinctive characteristic of Chrisitan life. To participate in the being of Jesus is to be free, and thus transcendence is experienced in human life as liberation. This is not a freedom from any particular set of restrictions but it is a freedom for others. As early as 1932, Bonhoeffer insisted that human freedom be understood in strictly social terms as man's freedom for others.[1] According to Bonhoeffer, freedom functions as a middle term between transcendence and acts of love. Freedom is rooted in God and Jesus disclosed God's freedom as freedom for man.[2] This freedom provides the necessary human conditions for effectively caring for others. Jesus maintains this freedom to be for others even to the point of suffering and death. In this freedom from self, says Bonhoeffer, is to be found all that we can know of God's omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence.

Our relation to the transcendent God is the reconciliation seen in Jesus' freedom to live for others. Our relation to God, whose transcendence is reconciliation seen in Jesus' freedom to live for others

> is not a 'religious' relationship to the highest, most powerful, and best Being imaginable--that is not authentic transcendence--but our relation to God is a new life in

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[1] Cf. Bonhoeffer, Creation and Fall, op. cit., pp. 37ff.
[2] Cf. Bonhoeffer, Act and Being, op. cit., pp. 90f.

> 'existence for others', through participation in the being of Jesus. The transcendental is not infinite and unattainable tasks, but the neighbour who is within reach in any given situation. God in human form--not, as in oriental religions, in animal form, monstrous, chaotic, remote, and terrifying, nor in the conceptual forms of the absolute, metaphysical, infinite, etc., nor yet in the Greek divine-human form of 'man himself', but 'the man for others', and therefore the Crucified, the man who lives out of the transcendent.[1]

God's transcendence is manifested not in "religion" but in a new orientation of human being toward life: existing for others after the pattern and in the power of Jesus' utterly selfless life.

The new life which is participation in the transcendence is experienced chiefly as powerlessness and suffering. God at the center of life is revealed most clearly and decisively in the cross of Christ.

> God lets himself be pushed out of the world on to the cross. He is weak and powerless in the world, and that is precisely the way, the only way, in which he is with us and helps us. . . . Christ helps us, not by virtue of his omnipotence, but by virtue of his weakness and suffering.[2]

All those in a "non-religious" world, who out of full human responsibility for others experience weakness and suffering, participate in the cross and hence in the transcendence of God. Thus, Christian faith is not merely a belief in a concept called transcendence, but the appropriation of that transcendence which is "The experience that a transformation of all human life is given in the fact that 'Jesus is there only for others'."[3]

Marx and Bonhoeffer emphasized the autonomy of man. But in the search for the autonomy of man Bonhoeffer was not so much removing God from the world's affairs as searching for God's real presence in that world. Whereas Marx found God as standing in the way of man's freedom and autonomy, a barrier to human emancipation, Bonhoeffer believed that God granted freedom and autonomy for man by making Jesus the point of disclosure for His transcendence. Whereas Marx defined transcendence as man's possibility to move towards the future with freedom and choice, so that he could shape his own destiny, Bonhoeffer gave a this-worldly interpretation of transcendence in which the experience of transcendence is Jesus' "being there for others." We already found that Jesus' "being there for others" means that the transcendent is met in the concern for others as given to us in the life and way of Jesus, and our faith is nothing but "participation in this being of Jesus." Transcendence, thus, refers to the transformation the sovereign and eternal God has effected upon the concrete human situation in terms of reconciliation, redemption, the restoration of health, the healing of social and political divisions, etc., and it is an ongoing process. Accordingly, transcendence must be grasped, not as it has so often been in the past, in spatial terms referring to the God "up there" beyond the affairs of human life, but specifically in terms of what God has effected historically, and is doing now, on behalf of man.

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[1] LPP, op. cit., pp. 381f ("Outline for a Book").
[2] LPP, op. cit., pp. 360f (16 July 1944).
[3] LPP, op. cit., p. 381 ("Outline for a Book").

By introducing the concept of this-worldly transcendence, by no means is Bonhoeffer writing off the transcendence of God in favor of His immanence. Rather, he believes that the idea of incarnation is conceivable only where there is both transcendence and immanence. And yet, in the incarnation God has affirmed the world and history in such a way that it is impossible to confine our apprehension of Him to a mythological or metaphysical elaboration of the event of incarnation. There should be some logical way of interpreting that event to the modern "non-religious" man. This is precisely what Bonhoeffer does by introducing the concept of this-worldly transcendence. He makes use of the humiliation of Jesus as the basis of his plea for a this-worldly understanding of transcendence. Jesus is the man in whom God reveals Himself, and He reveals Himself by absenting Himself in His power and glory. In this way, God reveals to us the this-worldly nature of His transcendence. And faith, in the full sense, can be understood only as man's response to this revelation. Our relation to God, then, is a new life and not "religion" in the traditional sense of the term; it is freedom to act responsibly for our neighbour's good, and not a "religious" relationship to a metaphysical being.

The importance of Bonhoeffer's interpretation of transcendence is that he gave it a profound sociological, and thus this-worldly, dimension. Instead of defining the relationship of the individual to the transcendent God solely in spiritual and individualistic ways, by employing the concept of this-worldly transcendence he challenged the individuals to a "transformation of all human life" and thus to struggle for the transformation of society by participating in Jesus' "being there for others." The world isolated in its own autonomy, which does not take seriously the revelation of God in this Jesus Christ, is only a utopia of ambitious man. For "The world has no reality of its own, independently of the revelation of God in Christ."[1]

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[1] Bonhoeffer, Ethics, op. cit., p. 197.

CHAPTER X

Bonhoefferian Theology as Challenge to Marxism

Today we face Marx's critique of religion in the form of the "mature world," and Bonhoeffer's own life-long endeavor was to encounter the latter. We discussed the nature of this encounter and the credibility of Bonhoefferian theology in the preceding four chapters. In this chapter, we shall first summarize our findings and examine the implications of Bonhoeffer's theology for the church's life today. We shall then proceed to inquire how Bonhoefferian theology functions as a challenge to Marxist philosophy.

The thrust of Bonhoeffer's theology, as we described it in the preceding pages, has been the Christocentric view of human life. The vision of the ever-living and ever-present Jesus Christ not only gave him a right perspective from which to look at every event and every problem of life but also made him free to cope with any situation without fear and anxiety. Bonhoeffer emphasized that in the modern secular age the mission of the church must assume a secular style. God's becoming man in Jesus represents a kind of radical secularization. God laid aside His religiousness and divine attributes, and took upon Himself the form of a servant. This was a secular form. Bonhoeffer exhorts Christians to assume the same secular form in their mission to the mature world.

This means that the individual Christian will have to assume a new life style. Bonhoeffer tells us that the Christian is not a special kind of man, a saint or homo religiosus. To be a Christian means to be a man--one who lives with the joy and freedom which belong to his proper nature. The Christian life is lived entirely in the world. Christian love is not a religious exercise or a spiritual concern. It is responsible action in the world. "Taking life in one's stride" and living unreservedly in all that it brings, then, is accepting the world God has given us as the place of our pilgrimage. This is not to accept the world as the only world we know. Our horizons extend beyond earthly existence, since the ultimate has been revealed to us beyond the penultimate.

It is in this sense that we must understand Bonhoeffer's call for a "religionless Christianity." It is certainly true of the Christian's faith that its risen Lord is present in all boundary situations, all possible life-crises--but also in situations which occur in the center of life. As Bonhoeffer sees it, the Bible is a recall to that faith, to the life in the world which is under God. There is no place for criticism of Bonhoeffer's vision of religionless Christianity as long as it is remembered that his continual effort for a non-religious interpretation was to reform the church in such a way that it could truly be a prophet and servant to the contemporary man.

Bonhoeffer has quite simply and clearly called the church to new obedience to the commandment of Jesus Christ. We can never know God as an idea, but only in and through our concrete encounter with others in our life in the world. God is to be known in human form, as a man existing for others; and the sole ground for the doctrine of His omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence is His freedom from self, maintained even to the point of the death of God incarnate. It is from this new understanding of transcendence that Bonhoeffer would have us re-interpret Biblical and theological concepts. His theology is one of commitment and involvement. To be a Christian means to be committed to and involved in a way of life in the world, and this is God's own way, as He is revealed in Jesus Christ.

According to Bonhoeffer, the message of the gospel enables the Christian to be fully in the world, but not of it. The world is the place where God's grace is operative. Writing to his fiancée from the prison, he expressed this faith in these succinct words:

> When I . . . think about the situation of the world, the complete darkness over our personal fate and my present imprisonment, then I believe that our union can only be a sign of God's grace and kindness, which calls us to faith. We would be blind if we did not see it. Jeremiah says at the moment of his people's great need 'still one shall buy houses and acres in this land' as a sign of trust in the future. This is where faith belongs. May God give it to us daily. And I do not mean the faith which flees the world, but the one that endures the world and which loves and remains true to the world in spite of all the suffering which it contains for us. Our marriage shall be a yes to God's earth; it shall strengthen our courage to act and accomplish something on the earth. I fear that Christians who stand with only one leg upon earth also stand with only one leg in heaven.[1]

However, in relating faith to the reality of the world, Bonhoeffer does not support any unconditional affirmation of the world's maturity or of the secularity which is its counterpoint. Rather, he upholds a steady, dialectical unity between Christ and world reality.

> God wants us to love him eternally with our whole hearts--not in such a way as to injure or weaken our earthly love, but to provide a kind of cantus firmus to which the other meoldies of life provide the counterpoint. . . . Where the cantus firmus is clear and plain, the counterpoint can be developed to its limits. The two are 'undivided and yet distinct', in the words of the Chalcedonian Definition, like Christ in his divine and human natures. . . . Only a polyphony of this kind can give life a wholeness and at the same time assure us that nothing calamitous can happen as long as the cantus firmus is kept going.[2]

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[1] LPP, op. cit., p. 415 ("The Other Letters from Prison"). The letter was dated 12 August 1943.

[2] LPP, op. cit., p. 303 (20 May 1944).

We have the polyphony in Jesus Christ who is the perfect unity of God and man. Bonhoeffer wants to confront man with this Christ, and that in man's full awareness of his autonomy.

Many people take it for granted that by his concept of religionless Christianity Bonhoeffer completely denies the necessity of religion. We may **make** this hasty judgment only if we take his words out of context, or if we do not give due consideration to the presuppositions he makes before he criticizes religion. In Ethics Bonhoeffer says that the Christian, even if he is ultimately concerned with "last things," must be immediately concerned with "things before last," that is to say, with the things of this world. At the same time he reminds us that the Christian is a man who is being "conformed" to Christ. This conformation takes place when "the form of Jesus Christ itself works upon us in such a manner that it moulds our form in its own likeness."[1] This does not happen because of our own efforts of will to be like Jesus. It is the work of grace, something that happens to us. The grace of God "opens before the secularized man of our time a dimension of human existence which might help him to live, in the midst of the confusion of his personal and social existence, with hope and responsibility."[2] Through prayer, meditation, worship, the sacraments, etc. our lives have been touched and transformed by the same God who was in Christ. If this is religion, then Bonhoeffer would certainly say that religion is fundamental to Christian life.

Let us not forget that the most radical critics of religion have spoken from within, and have been men with a clear vision of God. The prophets summoned men from empty cults to a genuine obedience before the Lord God. Jesus condemned the false religiosity of the Pharisees. The Apostles criticized some of the stringent religious practices of their time and stopped them. Bonhoeffer also stands in this tradition. The historical situation in which he lived moved him to criticize religion, for he lived in a religionless environment, where Christianity had been rejected. To his utmost disappointment, the large number of German Christians supported the Nazi state, as distinct from the Confessing Church which opposed it. Bonhoeffer recognized that in an increasingly secularized world a time might come when Christianity everywhere would be deprived of the recognition and privileges that it once enjoyed. He realized that Christians would have to depend more and more on the inward resources of faith, and less and less on outward supports. However, this does not mean that they would have to live without the spiritual practices of religion. Bonhoeffer himself called the church to practice the "secret discipline"[1] so that it may become in itself a living witness before it attempts too much to speak to the world.

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[1] Bonhoeffer, Ethics, op. cit., p. 80.

[2] Jan M. Lochman, "The Unfinished Reformation," Dialog, Vol. 8, No. 4, 1969, p. 271.

> Our church, which has been fighting in these years only for its self-preservation, as though that were an end in itself, is incapable of taking the word of reconciliation and redemption to mankind and the world. Our earlier words are therefore bound to lose their force and cease, and our being Christians today will be limited to two things: prayer and righteous action among man.[2]

It is the secret discipline which gives the Christian the direction for his mission. But at the same time Bonhoeffer also believed that our prayer and worship are all in vain if they make no difference to our lives or to the way we treat our neighbours. As Helmut Thielicke points out, Bonhoeffer

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[1] Vide supra, pp. 196ff.

[2] LPP, op. cit., p. 300 ("Thoughts on the Day of the Baptism of D. W. R. Bethge").

> did not reject the necessity of working on the liturgy and renewing it, but he did say, 'Only he who cries out for the Jews dare permit himself to sing in Gregorian.' He thereby blocked the potential escapist's path.[1]

Here we see no opposition to spirituality, but we are not allowed to use spirituality to avoid the demand of Christ that our lives be lived fully for others. Our spirituality should lead us to a sacramental presence in the world after the manner of Jesus himself. Jesus himself is the real sacrament.[2] He is the one through whose sacrificial action God touches and renews this world. Hence our partaking of the sacrament is not just a religious practice, but it means our participation in the suffering of God in the world. It is in this way that we witness to the lordship of Christ. As Charles West put it,

> . . . only the Christian's humble but confident journey itself, with whatever charges and burdens may be given him to carry, only his realistic concern for neighbours at cost to himself, can convince the unbeliever that the Lord and guide of the journey is the servant son of God who bore the cross.[3]

Bonhoeffer's plea for a religionless Christianity is also a plea for re-definition of the church. The church is an instrument for mission by the providence of God. As much as instruments need to be repaired, they have also to be refashioned from time to time according to changes in the nature and scope of the work for which they are used. That is why Bonhoeffer reminds us that if the church is to fulfill its mission it needs to be renewed and refashioned from within.

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[1] Helmut Thielicke, The Trouble with the Church: A Call for Renewal, trans. & ed. by John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 85.

[2] Vide supra, p. 192n. Also see, Bonhoeffer, Christ the Center, op. cit., pp. 53ff; Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, op. cit., p. 250; and Bonhoeffer, Life Together, op. cit., pp. 120ff.

[3] Charles West, Communism and the Theologians, op. cit., p. 387.

Thus the ministry of the church is both renewal within and mission to the world. This means that the center of church's concern should shift from within her walls to the surrounding community, and from exercises of ingrown piety to exercises of outgoing faith. This also means that our faith must be understood as commitment to work for the purposes of God and not as a pious hope for the next life. We can no longer regard the church building as the gate of heaven, but more as the gateway of the Christian to the world. Bonhoeffer also reminds us that the mission of the church should not be conceived relative to isolated verses from the Bible, but relative to the central Biblical theme of God's choice of men and of the peoples to bear his mission to the world. It is not an election to privilege, but an election to responsibility. Thus the mission is seen to be continuous with that of the chosen people Israel and of Jesus himself. The Israelites were to live and even to suffer in such a manner as to bring God's blessings upon all the nations of the earth. So also the church exists for the world and cannot live for itself. The mission is to be directed to human society in all its complexity, and not to an isolated entity within man called "soul" or to a dimension of life called "spiritual." The climax of the Bible story is not the salvation of individuals to some spiritual heaven--it is the renewal of God's creation, the coming of "a new heaven and a new earth." That is why the goal of history is not just that "the saved" will go to heaven--it is the "new Jerusalem," the city in which all the nations will find their true life and their true selfhood, in the light of Christ.

We shall now turn our attention to see how Bonhoefferian theology functions as a challenge to Marxist Philosophy. From Bonhoeffer's critique of religion it can be seen that he retained kinship with Marx in many respects. Marx's criticism, though they may sound exaggerated, does not take away the responsibility from the Christians to re-think their own beliefs.[1] Let us not forget that there is some truth in Marx's critique of religion, and of Christianity in particular. Many a Christian has found in his religion an excuse for not bothering with mundane problems. If Marx can awaken such Christians from their dogmatic slumber, we should be ready to salute Marx. In this sense Bonhoeffer's critique of religion is analogous to that of Marx's. We can even draw a parallel between "opium of the people" and "cheap grace." For Marx, "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the *opium* of the people."[2] According to Bonhoeffer, "We Lutherans have gathered like eagles round the carcase of cheap grace, and there we have drunk of the poison which has killed the life of following Christ."[3] In spite of this apparent similarity in their thoughts, Bonhoefferian theology functions as a corrective of Marx's critique of religion.

Marx argued that religion is an ideology which does not serve any real purpose to solve the problems of human beings who suffer from the miseries of this world. " Religion is *the fantastic* [phantastische] *realization* of the human essence because the *human essence* has no true reality."[4] It gives only illusory satisfaction to the oppressed people, and it is in this sense Marx regards religion as opium of the people. Here Bonhoefferian theology confronts Marxism with its steadfast concentration upon Christology. The figure of the incarnate, crucified, and risen Lord captivates his attention and evokes his faithful obedience. Bonhoeffer reminds us that the answer to the problem of ideology lies in the way the Christian responds to the fact that God so loved the world, that He sent Jesus Christ into the center of it, into the midst of the intricacies of man's relation to man.[1] The Christian is called to confront the world with this Christ, in that he shares the being of Christ with his neighbour. This confrontation, Bonhoeffer says, may not take the form of words at all, but of participation in common responsibilities with the world. On the occasion of the Baptism of D. W. R. Bethge, Bonhoeffer wrote:

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[1] *Vide supra*, pp. 107ff.
[2] *Vide supra*, p. 69.
[3] Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, *op. cit.*, p. 57.
[4] Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction," *On Religion*, *op. cit.*, pp. 41f.

> For you thought and action will enter on a new relationship; your thinking will be confined to your responsibilities in action. With us thought was often the luxury of the onlooker; with you it will be entirely subordinated to action. 'Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my father who is in heaven'.[2]

Here the Christian will act as one who knows that the reality of this world's human relations is the reality of Christ's relation to it. Man exists in a field of personal relations in the center of which is Jesus Christ.

Bonhoefferian theology challenges contemporary Marxists to change their attitude toward religion, and specifically to the question of God.

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[1] Cf. Paul Lehmann, *Ideology and Incarnation: A Contemporary Ecumenical Risk* (Geneva: John Knox Association, 1962).

[2] *LPP*, *op. cit.*, p. 298 ("Thoughts on the Day of the Baptism of D. W. R. Bethge").

Bonhoeffer is not speaking of a metaphysical concept of God but the God who is interested in the affairs of the world, not a God of metaphysical scheme but the God of history, of society, of the future--all in the concrete sense of God's way for mankind in Jesus Christ. If God is denied ideologically, as Marx does, man is threatened to become dissolved in the "penultimate." The "penultimate" becomes "ultimate" for him. His total destiny then depends on his own accomplishments. As long as man faces only successes in his life this dependence on accomplishments makes sense. But, then, what about human despair and frustration as they are evident in man's failure? Marx is not concerned about this question.

Here Bonhoefferian theology challenges Marxists to re-examine their philosophy to see whether they take into consideration the human person in his wholeness. As Josef Hromadka stated,

> Only that philosophy is right which wants not only to demonstrate and to interpret, to contemplate and to describe, but also wants to change the world and to transform it in the direction of perfect social justice and equality, freedom from hunger and misery, from injustice and exploitation.[1]

In his "Theses on Feuerbach," Marx said: "The Philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it."[2] But this thought provoking thesis was only helpful to promote one more impressive idea--unquestionably a welcome one--that theory and practice should be united. In order to change the world, philosophy must embrace the totality of human existence, its material as well as spiritual dimension. Marx fails to do this.

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[1] Josef Hromadka, "On the Threshold of Dialogue Between Christians and Marxists," Study Encounter, Vol. I, no. 3, 1965, p. 121.

[2] Vide supra, p. 54.

In this respect, Bonhoefferian theology is an advance on Marxist philosophy. Bonhoeffer reminds the Marxists that the gospel is concerned about the whole of life, and not merely certain aspects of life. There is no area of human experience to which it is not related. It may be true that religion has been narrowly confined to acts of worship, to certain spheres of human relationship, to the realm of the "spiritual" as differentiated from that of the "secular." This is so because many Christians have not understood the true significance of their faith as total commitment of all that concerns their individual and collective life to the sovereign lordship of Jesus Christ. For Bonhoeffer, secularity means that all of life is a gift from God, and authentic secularity is a fruit of the incarnation. Even politics and economics are subject to God's standards, control and judgment. By introducing the concept of religionless Christianity, as it is expounded in the themes of "Holy Worldliness," "Theology of Responsibility," and "Secret Discipline," Bonhoeffer appeals to the Marxists to reconsider their attitude toward Christianity in that authentic Christian faith is something other than the "religion" Marx criticized. Marx's theory that all religions are enemies of social revolution does not hold true. The "religionless Christian" who leads a "worldly life," as portrayed by Bonhoeffer, certainly plays a vital role in the transformation of society.

Marx interpreted man as part of a historical process. Everything is related to a historical development and conceived as a by-product of the past and of the present objective situation. He eliminates anything that could not be understood and perfectly explained on the basis of the continuous unbreakable chains of the processes of nature and history. It is true that in "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," Marx said: "Men make their own history." But, then, he continues:

> They do not make it just as they please: they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.[1]

Thus, according to Marx, human reason, conscience, and the very essence of man have no independent meaning. They do not transcend the boundary of historical process. They are part and parcel of historical nexus. In other words, men are caught up in a trap of historical process.

Here Bonhoefferian theology raises its objection and disagreement. Man is not only a part of nature and history. He is an entity in himself, standing as a responsible, morally and intellectually active, creative being, directing the way of history. History is his sphere of responsibility. This is not just another expression of some kind of idealistic philosophy, rather a consequence of the incarnation of Jesus Christ who is the Lord of nature and history.

> . . . the whole reality of the world is already drawn in into Christ and bound together in Him, and the movement of history consists solely in divergence and convergence in relation to this center.[2]

We cannot demonstrate or explain this reality impinged by Jesus Christ by scientific means. But the Christian knows by his faith that it is more real than anything demonstrable and explainable. It is this impingement which has shaped the history of man and thus, being beyond history, it is the most dynamic force in human life to transform the world.

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[1] Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," Marx & Engels: Selected Works, op. cit., p. 97.

[2] Bonhoeffer, Ethics, op. cit., p. 198.

> The world, the natural, the profane and reason are now all taken up into God from the outset. They do not exist 'in themselves' and 'on their own account'. They have their reality nowhere save in the reality of God, in Christ.[1]

Man is not completely left alone in the trap of history, but he is caught up in the reality of God as it is evident in Jesus Christ. The only way to demonstrate this reality is by personal witness and by fellowship with those who have heard and accepted this self-revelation of God. This is precisely what Bonhoeffer does with his theology as well as with his life.

Marx said: "To be radical is to grasp the root of the matter. But for man the root is man himself."[2] This undue optimism in the being of man is foreign to Christian concept of man. Referring to Jesus Christ as the norm and standard of the being of man, Karl Barth says:

> The being of man is the history which shows how one of God's creatures, elected and called by God, is caught up in personal responsibility before Him and proves itself capable of fulfilling it.[3]

Bonhoeffer also is thinking in a similar way. According to him, man's being is rooted in Jesus Christ. It is He who creates meaning and purpose in life, and it is through Him we know our creatureliness.

> Only in Christ does man know himself as the creature of God. . . . If he is to know himself as the creature of God, the old man must have died and the new arisen, whose essence it is to live in self-disregard, wholly in the contemplation of Christ. He knows himself as one who lives in Christ in identity with the old man who passed through death--knows himself as the creature of God.[4]

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction," On Religion, op. cit., p. 50.

[3] Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, Vol. III, Part 2, p. 55.

[4] Bonhoeffer, Act and Being, op. cit., p. 171.

Christ recreates the personal being of man so that his center of existence is no longer in himself. It is being-in-Christ. By this recreation the believer is constituted as a free person with responsibility in relation to Christ and his fellow man. The zeal of the Christian for the transformation of society, or the revolution in which the Christian is engaged in to change the structuress of society, is nothing but following Christ where He has preceded us. Paul Lehmann underlines this thought in these words:

> As regards what it means to be human and to gain the power to stay human, Jesus Christ is the 'wisdom of God' and the 'power of God' (I Cor. 1:24). He is 'the truth that will make [men] free' (John 8:32). In him men are already on the way toward being fully human--that is, whole, complete in themselves because completely related to their kind and to everything that God has made. Thus to be human is to be what God made and purposed man to be, and to exhibit the fact that God's chief prupose and man's chief end are identical.[1]

Marx conceived transcendence as a dynamic human reality, as a self-transcending formation of the meaning and values of our life. By transcendence he meant the movement of the living and humanly experienced present into the future. It is man's openness to what is to come and it is an unlimited openness. The future to which man is moving is completely open to him.[2] Here Bonhoefferian theology would question the content of the future which Marx envisions. Would this future be just an extension of the present with all its experienced conflicts or would there be a qualitative difference in that future? If transcendence is only a leap into the future, as Marx conceives it, and if that future has no qualitative difference from the present, then, man remains in the abyss of existential predicament. In contrast to Marx's concept of transcendence, Bonhoeffer gave a this-worldly interpretation of transcendence in which the experience of transcendence is Jesus' "being there for others."[1] This means the transcendent God is met in the concern for others as given to us in the life and way of Jesus. A Christian's faith is nothing but "participation in this being of Jesus." Transcendence, thus, refers to the transformation God effects upon humanity in its entirety. In this way, the future which the Christian looks forward to is not just an extension of the present; it is qualitatively different.

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[1] Paul Lehmann, "On Keeping Human Life Human," *The Christian Century*, Vol. LXXXI, No. 43, 1964, p. 1299.

[2] *Vide supra*, pp. 93ff.

Marx considered man as a limitless being. He believed that God is the end of the possibilities which are the breath of our being. According to him, nature and man are no longer two powers in opposition to one another, but two terms of one relation. Through a vital interplay with nature man makes himself. Thus man rises over all other animal species and begins an historical evolution; he becomes the creator of a better society.

But it is wrong to say that only this kind of naturalism can open the way for man's true humanity. Man's real humanity is exclusively founded in his dependence on God and His will. Otherwise he misuses his neighbour and nature, as is evident in many Marxist societies. In many parts of the world Marxist ideology has become a betrayal of the revolution in which the world is engaged in. Its hope is in an earthly utopia. The proletarian, whom Marx extolled to the highest degree, finds himself being used for the ends of the party's strategy, rather than being himself the object of concern. The ideal of a socialist society and the hope for a classless society are used to cover continued exploitation, and the hope for a classless society becomes the opium for the people. Thus the vices against which Marx rebelled return in new clothing because this revolutionary power in itself is corruptible.

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[1] Vide supra, pp. 214ff.

Man's humanity is not based upon himself or upon nature but is only possible in obedience to his Lord. Man is a limited being. The Lord Himself who gives man life, spirit, and form is his limit, and this limit is grace, the source of freedom. "The limit [of man] is grace because it is the basis of creatureliness and freedom. . . . Grace is that which supports man over the abyss of non-being, non-living, that which is not created."[1] It is this grace which defines the form and direction of man's freedom. Man has been given power and freedom to have dominion over the whole creation. He has been given the possibilities to explore nature. But this freedom for exploration should not blind his limits. He is to know the possibilities given him "in relation" to God and his fellow human beings, and not in the light of the infinite possibilities of which Marx speaks about. As Charles West put it:

> Man is to know himself in relation, and not himself as master or absolute subject, apart from the relation. In short he is to know good, but not good and evil. He is to be creature, and not God.[2]

Marx was keenly aware of the necessity of humanization of society. He asserted that humanization can be attained by the abolition of private property, the most important cause of man's dehumanization.[3] This humanization is something which man, and man alone, can accomplish. Paul Lehmann calls this "humanistic messianism."

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[1] Bonhoeffer, Creation and Fall, op. cit., p. 53.

[2] Charles West, The Power to be Human: Toward a Secular Theology (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1971), p. 241.

[3] Vide supra, pp. 101ff.

> *Humanistic messianism* is a passion for and vision of human deliverance and fulfillment by the powers of man alone. Its radical immanentism denies the reality and the necessity of incarnation.[1]

Humanistic messianism was able to change the relations of property, but it was not able to replace property with a new value. The roots of evil go beyond social and economic conditions. The reality of evil cannot be abolished by the humanized society. This is not mere pessimism, nor an indifferent attitude to social and political aspirations of humanity, but an appeal to give up the illusory hopes of man. Even the humanized society will badly need the message of the divine grace, forgiveness, redemption, and self-denying love.

According to Bonhoeffer, humanization is possible because of the incarnation. It is not man's accomplishment, but a gift from God. In Jesus Christ God became man. He is the one who leads the path to humanization, and Christians are called to be agents of the process of humanization.

> *Ecce homo*!--Behold the man! In Him the world was reconciled with God. It is not by its overthrowing but by its reconciliation that the world is subdued. It is not by ideals and programmes or by conscience, duty, responsibility and virtue that reality can be confronted and overcome, but simply and solely by the perfect love of God. Here again it is not by a general idea of love that this is achieved, but by the really *lived* love of God in Jesus Christ.[2]

Again, in the words of Paul Lehmann, this can be called "messianic humanism."

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[1] Paul Lehmann, *Ideology and Incarnation*, *op. cit.*, p. 25.
[2] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

> Messianic humanism . . . is a passion for and vision of human deliverance and fulfillment derived from the fact and the power of God's incarnate humanity in Jesus Christ. Its divinely initiated reality and orientation deny the reality and the possibility of the faith and ethos of immanental humanism.[1]

Messianic humanism keeps the horizons of human solidarity open, seeking in every situation new possibilities for a greater justice, freedom, and peace.

From a Bonhoefferian point of view the kernel of humanization is God's re-definition of our self-understanding and His re-direction of our freedom. This re-definition and re-direction is the heart of what happened in Jesus Christ. Thus, the criterion of humanization is Jesus Christ Himself. Authentic humanization is God's humanization by which He self-humanized in Jesus Christ. The task of humanization can be accomplished only in relation to and dependence on God, the author of humanization. We do this by participating in Jesus' "being there for others." This is to see the world in the hands of the redeemer and to be concerned for its peace, its prosperity, and its solidarity in love. It means to take one's place as a servant and witness of Christ's work, free from anxiety about the successes of our revolutions or the maintanence of our structures. We are not called to be successful but to be faithful.

Marx, of course, disagrees. According to him, dependence on God and human freedom are incompatible. He understands freedom as independence. "A being only considers himself independent when he stands on his own feet; and he only stands on his own feet when he owes his existence to himself."[2] This is precisely what Emil Brunner called sin:

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[1] Paul Lehmann, Ideology and Incarnation, op. cit., p. 25.
[2] Manuscripts, op. cit., p. 144.

> Sin is emancipation from God, giving up the attitude of dependence, in order to try to win full independence, which makes man equal with God. The nature of sin is shown by Jesus in the son who asks his father for his inheritance in order that he may leave home and become 'independent'.[1]

This longing to be "independent" is not bound to certain social structures--let them be capitalistic or proletarian. Man is a sinner means that everything is under God's curse. There is no sinless relationship between man and nature, man and neighbour, but everything is infected by the same perversion. It is hopeless to change this situation just by abolishing private property.

Property in itself is not bad but the man who uses it may be. There is no difference, whether we speak of private property or of state capitalism, there is always a group or class which is privileged above others to own or to enjoy. The question is: whether everybody uses his gifts according to God's will or according to his selfishness, whether the structures of society are filled with responsibility to God and the neighbour or they are being used for the benefit of certain groups at the cost of the other members of society. Here Bonhoeffer reminds Marxists that the responsibility and freedom of man is rooted in what is beyond nature and history.[2] Only as we penetrate the depth of this fact can we save man from the tyranny of the material world. Bonhoeffer says:

> Responsibility and freedom are corresponding concepts. Factually, though not chronologically, responsibility presupposes freedom and freedom can consist only in responsibility. Responsibility is the freedom of men

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[1] Emil Brunner, The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption, trans. by Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1952), p. 93.

[2] *Vide supra*, pp. 193ff.

> which is given only in the obligation to God and to our neighbour.[1]

Freedom is impossible as long as there is no real responsibility to God. Marx rejected every responsibility to God and attacked every belief in God. He was convinced that man can and must create his own conditions for living perfectly. Consequently, "humanistic messianism" as seen in Marxist societies can only create new wrong social structures. On the contrary, the Biblical witness reveals the evil roots of human misery and economic conditions of human life. It makes man in his deepest personal identity responsible for his actions, successes and failures, without denying the urgency of the struggle for social, economic, and political pre-requisites of righteousness, equality, and brotherhood. As Bonhoeffer put it:

> The action of the responsible man is performed in the obligation which alone gives freedom and which gives entire freedom, the obligation to God and to our neighbour as they confront us in Jesus Christ.[2]

Bonhoeffer reminds us that it is Christ, and Christ alone, who validates the world of responsible secular men. The meaning of the life of Jesus of Nazareth is that God and the world can no longer be separated.

> Whoever sets eyes on the body of Jesus Christ in faith can never again speak of the world as though it were lost, as though it were separated from Christ. . . . it is only in Christ that the world is what it is.[3]

If Christ is the Lord of all, then, we are called in obedience to serve all men in His name. It is this obedience, and not some revolutionary principles, which should lead us to servanthood. In that sense our service is a diakonia, a reflection of God's love to the people. Conformed to the image of Christ, we are given new possibilities for service in the world. Here again Bonhoeffer is concerned not to provide religious sanction for some worldly movement but to discern the form of Christ's work in the world and bear witness to it by our own words and actions. The Christian's task is to find out where God is on the move in His world today, and then make all possible haste to be there with Him. In this way we respond to Marx's critique of religion that Christianity is not the opium of the people but a way of life in which the Christian participates in Jesus's "being there for others" for the total humanization of humanity.

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[1] Bonhoeffer, Ethics, op. cit., p. 248.
[2] Ibid., p. 249.
[3] Ibid., p. 205.

PART III

CONCLUSION

CHAPTER XI

A Call for Dialogue

The purpose of this study has not been to erect a platform from which to defend Christianity or to hurl invectives at Marxists. Rather it is to seek ways which will give to all of us an opportunity to live in fellowship despite our differences, and to understand those differences in such a way that the fellowship can increase even though the differences do not decrease. The corrective we made of Marx's critique of religion and the challenge we presented to Marxism were not meant to proclaim the superiority of Christianity, or to prove that Christianity is better equipped with solutions to human problems. They are intended to remind both Marxists and Christians how profound human life is meant to be in the providence of God, how we have fallen short in our attempts to reach that profundity, and how we might help each other attain that profundity.

By examining Marx's critique of religion optimistically and without prejudice we found that Marxists and Christians can agree, in spite of several disagreements, that both are ultimately concerned for true humanity, especially for the rights of the poor and needy, the hungry and hopeless; both could agree that they strive to be "true to the earth."[1] We observed that Marx's atheism is primarily an anthropological affirmation; it is another way of putting human being in the center of human interest and concern. We also found that Marx's critique of religion indeed helps us to awaken from our dogmatic slumber. By making a

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[1] Friedrich Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, trans, by R. J. Hollingdale (Baltimore; Penguin Books, 1969), p. 42.

Bonhoefferian corrective of Marx's critique of religion, we demonstrated that whatever the traditional interpretation or historical function of Christian faith may have been, its essential ingredients allow for a radical affirmation of man's this-worldly being. The essence of Christian faith is even consistent with unqualified commitment to revolutionary struggle in the name of man against the forces of alienation. This corrective also served the purpose of presenting to the church a new understanding of itself and of the autonomous modern world, and it reminded us what it means to be a Christian in the world come of age.

This renewed understanding of faith has serious implications for our encounter with Marxism. Conviction about one's own beliefs does not necessarily involve condemnation of the beliefs of others. If one describes oneself as a Christian it would follow that he would ascribe validity to the substance of that faith. And if he is convinced of the validity of his beliefs he should be free to commend them to others, and correct the positions of others if necessary. This does not mean that we reject the being of the other person, but that we affirm humanity. Such freedom to hold to one's own beliefs, to give expression to them in characteristic forms, and to tell others about them ought to be the privilege of all human beings. This calls forth a dialogue between Marxists and Christians.

> The Church's renewed understanding of herself and of the world makes it possible for her henceforth to enter into dialogue with everybody, without abandoning her "claim to exclusiveness," . . . which previously seemed to make sincere dialogue virtually impossible in advance both for the world and for the Church.[1]

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[1] Edward Schillebeeckx, God the Future of Man, trans. by N. D. Smith (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968), p. 124.

As far as the dialogue between Marxists and Christians is concerned, it is the affirmation of our faith which motivates, and which should motivate Christians to enter into dialogue. Our faith becomes more meaningful only when we live in encounter with fellow human beings. "The Church is the sacrament of dialogue, of communication between men."[1] Dialogue is a way in which we express our humanity. Those who believe in a God who is living and active must hold that His spirit is present in all situations. They therefore enter into dialogue in expectation and hope; not solely or primarily for the conversion of the other. The Christian enters dialogue seeking enlightenment and enrichment as he probes more deeply into "the unsearchable riches of Christ."[2]

The history of the past three decades will tell us that both Christianity and Marxism have come to a new awareness of their positions. Today the church is stripped of the secular supports of the "Constantinian era." It is aware of its minority situation in society. Even in the so-called Christian countries of the West the serious impact of the current trend of secularization has placed the church in a minority situation. We can no longer be masters of society. Our service is a service of "Socratic evangelism." Christians may no longer act as those who know everything better, or as those who know all truth, but as those who help to find the truth. As midwives they help bring truth into being.[3]

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ephesians 3:8.

[3] Cf. Jan M. Lochman, "The Church and the Humanization of Society," Union Seminary Quarterly Review, Vol. XXIV, No. 2, 1969, pp. 135f.

This new awareness of the church, for which Bonhoeffer himself is partly responsible, has not become an ideology; it has taken the form of action. In many European countries the turning point in the church's encounter with Marxism was World War II. In concentration camps and in resistance movements there was the possibility of common action and common suffering, of mutual respect and eventually of understanding. The Second Vatican Council contributed greatly in changing the climate and encouraging reconsideration of traditional positions of Christians and atheists. Pope John XXIII's encyclical, *Pacem in Terris*, has taken into consideration the question of the church's dialogue with the world.[1] The council established the Secretariat for Non-believers which seek to enter into dialogue with all forms of atheism.[2] In 1966 WCC's Church and Society Conference of Geneva recommended a dialogue between Christians and advocates of non-Christian ideologies. In the conference report there is even a passage which will remind us Marx's famous declaration, "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it."[3] The conference affirmed that Christianity

> remains a discipline which aims not at a theoretical system of truth but at action in human society. Its object is not simply to understand the world but to respond to the power of God which is recreating it. . . . Christian theology is prophetic only in so far as it dares, in full reflection, to declare how, at a particular place and time, God is at work, and thus to show the Church where and when to participate in his work.[4]

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[1] For the complete text of the encyclical, see, *Pacem in Terris: Encyclical Letter of Pope John XXIII, April 11, 1963* (Washington D.C.: National Catholic Welfare Conference, n.d.).

[2] For the details of the functioning of this Secretariat, see, Franz Cardinal König, "The Second Vatican Council and the Secretariat for Non-Believers," *Concurrence*, Vol. I, No. 1, 1969, pp. 34ff.

[3] *Vide supra*, p. 54.

[4] *World Conference on Church and Society, Geneva, July 12-26, 1966: Official Report*, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

These developments show that the church is vitally interested in the thoughts and problems of this world.

The church's newfound openness has shattered the chains of the social order of Marx's time. Marxist thinkers have well responded to these changes. When the death-of-God theology stormed the theological arena in the United States, Vítězslav Gardavsky, then a professor of Marxist philosophy at the Brno Military Academy in Czechoslovakia, challenged his Marxist colleagues with a book entitled God Is Not Yet Dead.[1] Though Gardavsky was not speaking for the Communist Party, it is significant that such a title came from a Marxist Philosopher. His book is both an argued defense of atheism and an attempt to understand what Christianity can offer to Marxism.

Luigi Longo, then Secretary General of the Italian Communist Party, said at the 11th Party Congress in January 1966:

> We are now witnessing a transcending of the ideological positions of conservatism, which made religious 'ideology' the 'opium of the people' and the change is the result of the new way the church is facing up to modern world.[2]

Even more revealing was the statement made by Dolores Ibarruri to the leaders of the Communist Parties gathered for an important meeting in Karlovy Vary (Karlsbad) in April 1967. She said:

> We can not close our eyes to the changes in the Catholic Church which are going on before us. Should we still attempt to repulse forces [referring to Christians] who no longer want to be the opium of the people, but to change society? The Communists must give more respect to the political and philosophical thought of the Catholics.[3]

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[1] Vítězslav Gardavsky, God Is Not Yet Dead, trans. by Vivienne Menkes (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1973).

[2] Cited by Charles M. Savage, "Critique Re-considered," Study Encounter, Vol. IV, No. 1, 1968, p. 4.

[3] Ibid., p. 5.

XUM

She was speaking out of her concrete experience in Spain, where many Christians are actively involved in the process of social change. In short, many Marxists still show their willingness to give serious attention to Marx's statement: "the criticism of religion is in the main complete."[1]

This openness on the part of Christians and Marxists has brought them together on various occasions for dialogue with each other. Thus in 1965 the Czech Communists, on the 550th anniversary of the martyrdom of John Hus, invited Catholic and Protestant scholars from the West to an international symposium on Hus. In 1966 the Roman Catholic publisher, Herder & Herder, Inc., brought out two books as its contribution to the Marxist-Christian dialogue.[2] During their publication a dialogue took place at the Harvard Divinity School in which the two authors and several leading theologians and philosophers from the United States participated.[3] In 1967 the Sociological Institute of the Czechoslovakian Academy of Science and the Paulus-Gesellschaft (an organization of theologians and scientists) invited two hundred Marxist and Christian philosophers, scientists and theologians for a dialogue at Marianbad (Czechoslovakia).[4] These are only some of the dialogues which took place in the 1960's between Marxists and Christians. Even though these dialogues didn't produce noticeable joint action in service of humanity, they did create an atmosphere for mutual trust. But in 1968 both Russia's invasion of

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[1] Vide supra, p. 53.

[2] Roger Garaudy, From Anathema to Dialogue: A Marxist Challenge to the Christian Churches, op. cit., & Leslie Dewart, The Future of Belief: Theism in a World Come of Age, op. cit.

[3] For the details of this dialogue, see, Initiative in History: A Christian-Marxist Exchange (Cambridge, Mass.: The Church Society for College Work, 1967).

[4] For a report on this dialogue, see, Jan M. Lochman, "Creativity and Freedom in a Human Society," Communio Viatorum, Vol. X, 1967, pp. 115ff.

Czechoslovakia and the United States' escalation of the Vietnam War broke the dialogue and created an environment of mistrust.[1]

The dialogue needs to continue. In a way, both Marxists and Christians are talking about the same thing: actual man in the real world and society. But although they are talking about the same thing, they are doing it from different points of view. That is why dialogue is necessary. Marxists and Christians cannot proclaim their unique message to contemporary men unless they do it in dialogue with those who have differently oriented ways of understanding man. Thus the resources of both can be used for the development of humanity. Paul Oestreicher has said:

> Christian Marxist dialogue is not essentially an activity in which the "goodies" talk to the "baddies." In theory it is a dialogue between two groups of "goodies," each with a particular type of insight into the nature of truth. In practice it is a dialogue between "baddies" who historically have often betrayed their own vision.[2]

Thus Marxists and Christians should acknowledge their sins of omission and practice metanoia. Marxist-Christian dialogue should be based on this metanoia.

Charles Savage points out the error in Marxist and Christian positions in these words:

> Were we to caricature the traditional position of the Christians and the Marxists we might say: Christianity proclaimed a new heaven, but forgot about a new earth; while Marxism proclaimed a new earth, but forgot a new heaven.[3]

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[1] Many Marxist thinkers who flourished in the spring thaw during Dubcek's time have been removed from positions of responsibility and leadership since the crisis of 1968. Here we must say that ideological discussion and Realpolitik should not be mixed together.

[2] Paul Oestreicher, ed., The Christian Marxist Dialogue (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1969), p. 3.

[3] Charles M. Savage, op. cit., p. 3.

Dialogue's purpose is to overcome these dual errors. It is an example of living together in the emerging pluralistic world society. It is a way of seeking truth. As Nicolas Berdyaev expressed his strong conviction

> truth cannot be imprisoned in any social net, socialist or capitalist, and . . . those who pursue the knowledge of truth step tiresomely and boldly out of neat prisons into worlds that have more to them than sociology or science could ever contain.[1]

Marxists and Christians should meet as people concerned with the questions and problems faced by humanity, to think and act together as human beings. The initiative for this can come either from Christians or from Marxists. Where other initiatives do not exist, the Christians should take the initiative, both as members of humanity and as those who have experienced the redeeming love of God in Jesus Christ.

The dialogue does not imply the weakening or giving up of conflicting positions. Dialogue must be conceived and murtured as the one viable method for dealing with ideological and social conflict; its only alternatives are isolation or annihilation. And yet we engage in dialogue not out of fear, nor as a diplomacy for human survival. As Harvey Cox said:

> Even if there were no nuclear threat Christians and Communists should be conversing. We should converse not just to avoid death but to affirm life. Life is by its very nature dialogical and dialectical. This is the real reason for dialogue.[2]

The aim of such a dialogue is to develop both the conflicting positions according to their own respective logic and impulse, to help the Marxist to become more truly Marxist and the Christian to become more truly

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[1] Nicolas Berdyaev, Dream and Reality: An Essay in Autobiography, trans. by Katharine Lampert (New York: Collier Books, 1962), p. 125.

[2] Harvey Cox, "The Marxist-Christian Dialogue: What Next?" Marxism and Christianity, ed. by Herbert Aptheker (New York: Humanities Press, 1968), p. 23.

Christian by mutual questioning and challenge and by collaboration in the interest of mankind, wherever this is possible. A dialogue of this kind has only one necessary presupposition, a common conviction of the essential oneness and final victory of truth; and therefore openness, expectation and readiness to learn. The dialogue is necessary in order to clarify positions, to reaffirm the common humanity of all men and to open oneself up to the possible truth in another's position. As Reuel Howe rightly pointed out:

> The truth of each needs to be brought into relation with the truth of others in order that the full dimension of the truth each has may be made known. Such is the task of dialogue.[1]

Dialogue has certain prior assumptions. Respect for the other, willingness to learn and change when necessary are basic necessities. The suggestion that the Christian should be willing to change may cause some anxiety, but it may be that we go a step further in grasping "the breadth and length and height and depth"[2] of the divine love in Christ by confronting Him in the brother for whom He died. As Social Democrat, Gustav Heinemann of West Germany, a prominent lay Christian, said: "Christ did not die against Karl Marx."[3] What Heinemann implied was that Christ died for Marx, as He died for every other person. God who used the Philistines to teach the Israelites a lesson can also use Marxists of our time to speak to us. Both Marxists and Christians live under the sovereign lordship of Christ, though Marxists may not heed to this idea.

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[1] Reuel L. Howe, The Miracle of Dialogue (New York: The Seabury Press, 1963), p. 121.

[2] Ephesians 3:18.

[3] Cited by Paul Oestreicher, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

XUM

Dialogue is not intended to suppress our differences or to abdicate one's own position. Rather the purpose is to discover how the opposition can be a dynamic force for genuine human existence and development, and not to see differences as obstacles to cooperation, co-existence, or even pro-existence. As Milan Opocensky remarked: "We need a dialogue with Marxists for our own spiritual growth and development, as they need us."[1]

Marxist-Christian dialogue should not be confined to philosophical or doctrinal issues, although dialogue on these issues will always be necessary. Genuine dialogue can never be confined to conversations between that small group of philosophers and theologians who might presume to represent entire communities of men. We also need a life of dialogue for the fulfillment of common task in the world. It is true only part of that task can be common. There are certain elements like the proclamation of the Gospel and the sacramental worship of God which Christians are unable to share with Marxists. But our responsibility to transform the world in accordance with the purposes of God is one that we share with all men of good will. The immediate problems of the world--hunger, population explosion, illiteracy, pollution, energy, the spiritual confusion of our day, etc. demand an end to the hurling of condemnation and pronouncing of mutual anathemas. The church must be ready to witness to the lordship of Christ by cooperating with men of good will who are genuinely concerned to seek better ways of living and working--no matter what their political, social, or philosophical convictions.

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[1] Milan Opocensky, "The Case of Marxism," Religion and International Affairs, ed. by Jeffrey Rose & Michael Ignatieff (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1968), p. 92.

Thus it is a foolish way of putting it to ask: whether Marxists and Christians should first achieve a certain consensus about philosophical issues and then secondarily apply that consensus in the social realm, or whether Marxists and Christians must first be engaged in the struggle for peace and justice in the world in order to achieve that common philosophical perspective. Both inquiries go hand in hand. The church must be prepared to enter into common cause with any group, regardless of caste, colour or creed, in the task of restoring meaning and purpose to human life, under whatever rubric this task might be conceived, whether it be called salvation or liberation, redemption or humanization. This means that the church needs to be present in trade unions, political parties, and every other secular institution to promote justice and compassion.[1] In this way ordinary men and women who are engaged in the actual life-situations participate in the dialogue. These life-situations are the places where our metanoia is tested. If we are afraid of cooperation with Marxists or people of other faiths because the existence of the church is thereby threatened we are of little faith, for then we do not believe in the power of the living God, but we judge instead by human standards. Faith in the living God who is lord of the world and of the church knows no fear concerning the future of the church. To a certain extent we can even endorse much of the Marxist drive toward secularization and humanization. But the basis for this endorsement is not a subscription to Marxist ideology, but that Christology of "Für-andere-da-sein" which we recognized earlier in this study.[2] Thus by our attitude of responsibility for the transformation of society and concern for others, we help to set the stage in which God's Word can speak freely to man.

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[1] Cf. Bonhoeffer, No Rusty Swords, op. cit., p. 221.
[2] Vide supra, pp. 214ff.

As we enter into dialogue both Marxists and Christians have to heed a specific caution. Marxists and Christians are not the only people needed in this dialogue; what is needed is a truly interdisciplinary approach. Not only must we invite the insights of other religions and political orientations, but the moral disciplines of religion and politics must also seek the wisdom of those disciplines of the arts and sciences. All must avoid the illusion that problems can be solved by any sort of clique, whether this be the Marxist-Christian clique or the scientist-Christian clique. Nor will solutions proceed from the simple reduction of differences. The solutions required by the real world must go beyond the rote harmonization of theoretical similarities. They must have a transcendent dimension. There are thousands of problems to be approached in humility, openness, sincerity and in willingness to learn. In short, Marxist-Christian dialogue is only a part of the church's dialogue with the world.[1] Exhorting the church to a genuine encounter with the world, Schillebeeckx says:

> The Church does not simply have something to *communicate*. In order to communicate, she must also *receive from* and *listen to* what comes to her from the world as "foreign prophecy," but in which she nonetheless recognizes the well-known voice of her Lord. The relationship between the Church and the world is thus no longer the relationship of a 'teaching' Church to a 'learning' world, but the interrelationship of dialogue in which both make a mutual contribution and listen sincerely to each other.[2]

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[1] The Second Vatican Council emphasized the necessity of church's dialogue with the world. See, "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," *The Documents of Vatican II*, *op. cit.*, pp. 199ff.

[2] Edward Schillebeeckx, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

As Bonhoeffer has reminded us, it is wrong to presume that only Christianity has the answers to human problems.[1] But in all humility and sincerity the Christian can join with others in seeking solutions to human problems, trusting in the lord of the world whom he encounters in Jesus Christ and in his fellow human being.

Let us conclude this study by repeating two quotations from Bonhoeffer which best summarize his thoughts, and which direct our encounter with Marxism.

> To be a Christian does not mean to be religious in a particular way, to make something of oneself (a sinner, a penitent, or a saint) on the basis of some method or other, but to be a man--not a type of man, but the man that Christ creates in us. It is not the religious act that makes the Christian, but participation in the sufferings of God in the secular life. That is *metanoia*: not in the first place thinking about one's own needs, problems, sins, and fears, but allowing oneself to be caught up into the way of Jesus Christ.[2]
>
> . . . it is only by living completely in this world that one learns to have faith. One must completely abandon any attempt to make something of oneself, whether it be a saint, or a converted sinner, or a churchman (a so-called priestly type!), a righteous man or an unrighteous one, a sick man or a healthy one. By this-worldliness I mean living unreservedly in life's duties, problems, successes and failures, experiences and perplexities. In so doing we throw ourselves completely into the arms of God, taking seriously, not our own sufferings, but those of God in the world--watching with Christ in Gethsemane. That, I think, is faith; that is *metanoia*; and that is how one becomes a man and a Christian.[3]

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[1] *LPP*, *op. cit.*, pp. 311f (29 May 1944).
[2] *LPP*, *op. cit.*, p. 361 (18 July 1944).
[3] *LPP*, *op. cit.*, pp. 369f (21 July 1944).

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